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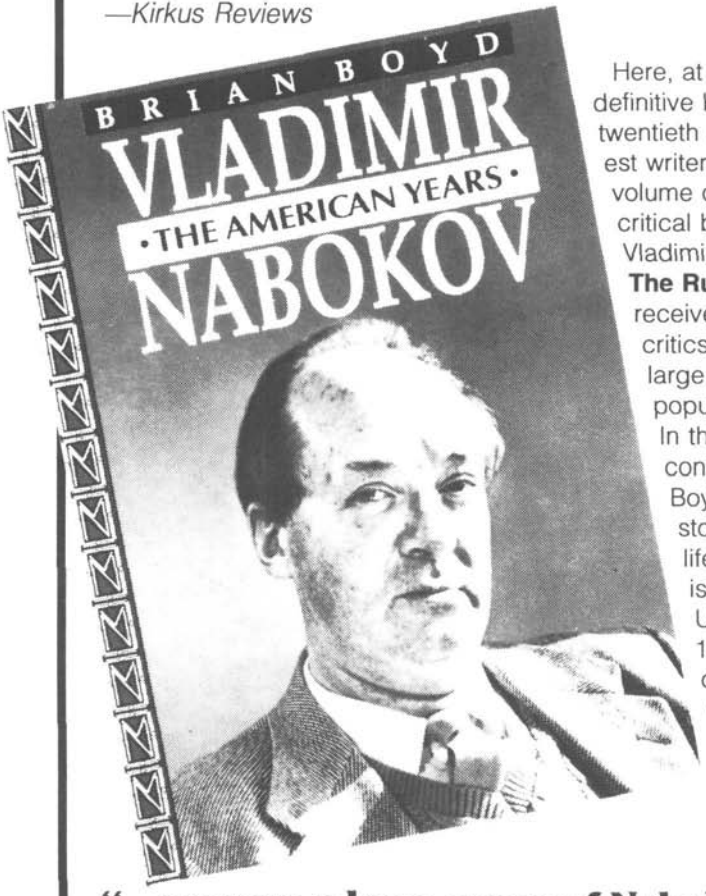

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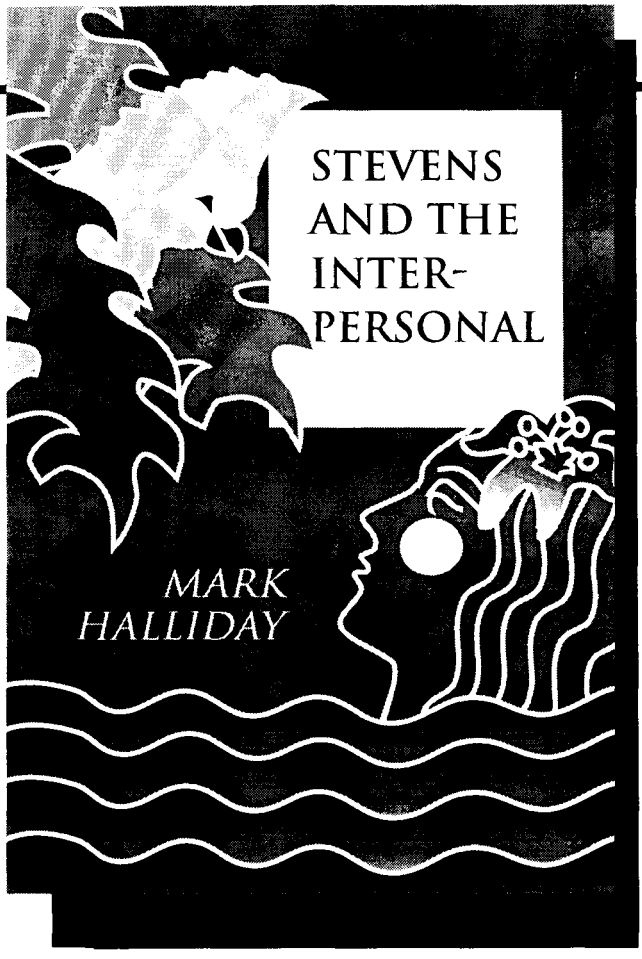

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The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

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Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors:

That's a sad little piece by Joseph Epstein in your Spring 1991 issue. Imagine longing for a time when men taught in suits and wore serious hats (p. 9); when the best and brightest university men were not "original thinkers or even . . . great scholars, but . . . did have an indisputable seriousness about them that was impressive in their own day and seems no less so in ours" (p. 15). Then, strangely, he accuses the new breed of scholars not only of excessive personal variety, but also of a collective excessive seriousness. He misses the old sense of humor, he says, which—from his own examples of jokes mostly involving cannibals and feminists—seems to have depended on insult.

But for such a *cri de coeur*, Epstein's essay has given hours of active pleasure to one English department. The little zoo at Denison University, that "school in the fastness of Ohio" visited by Mr. Epstein "a number of years ago" has been enjoying itself hugely tracking down his characterization of us as "altogether too tidy": being made up of "two blacks, one feminist, a homosexual, a Jew, and a bedraggled woman" (p. 12). We had to find out exactly when he came here (it was November 17, 1980); then which chair ignored his letter asking if we couldn't find a better Jew (it turns out that he wrote to a colleague on leave, not the chair); who the two blacks were; who the "bedraggled woman"; and who in the name of all closets the one homosexual might have been.

Because our secretary, a fierce Marxist who was in 1980 the only self-conscious theorist among us, kept meticulous records, we have been able to ascertain that the man who chaired us at that time never received the letter Epstein claims to have written; that the department as it was then constituted included (along with a preponderance of WASP gentlemen) one black, three Jews (one well-tanned and curly-haired), one Asian-American, five women of varying degrees of sartorial splendor and personal (not yet literary) feminism, and no *known* homosexual—though perhaps Epstein has exceptional gaydar. It is astonishing to find oneself so misrepresented in a respectable publication, but the experience did give us a chance to delight in our disparate selves.

Today, ten years later, our diversity is constituted differently from either the way it was in 1980 or the way Epstein thought it was. Two Jews left; the last and best retires in May. The current two blacks are wonderfully disparate from each other and within themselves: he a gentleman Miltonist of the old school who currently studies West African and Caribbean writers; she a specialist in writing by women of

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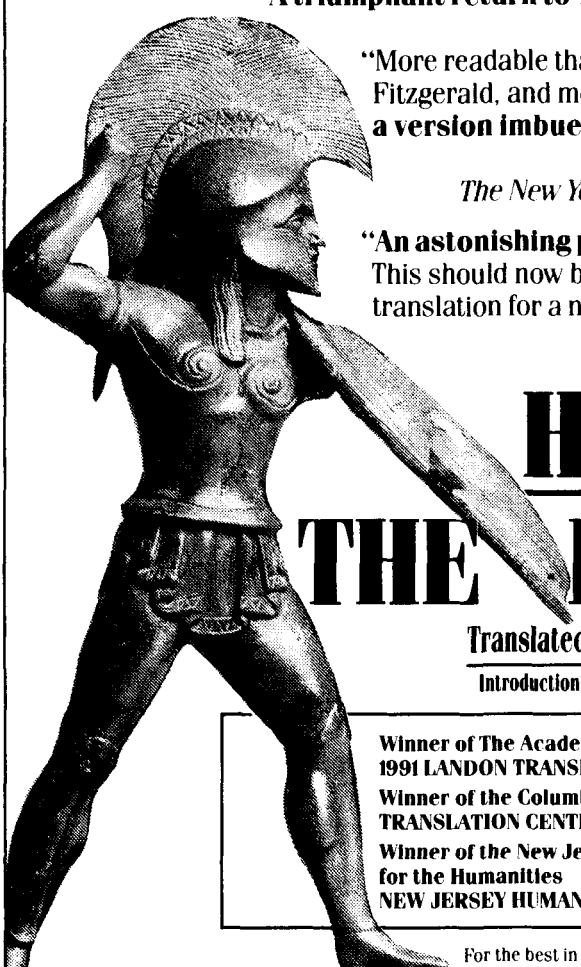

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color and author of a book on Herman Melville. There are still five women, all theoretical feminists to some degree. Two are lesbians but none is conspicuously bedraggled; there is still no gay man on the English staff.

Theory, though, is out of the closet here. Feminism, Marxism, New Historicism; deconstruction and psychology in the service of social history; though since our undergraduates aren't all armed with top of the line SAT scores we have to teach them in plain English. We offer our ever more heterogenous students literature to learn from as well as art to admire. A young first-generation Asian-American, for instance, may not be so at home in English that she can appreciate the Latinate magnificence of Milton's language, but knowing his reputation she can see how his presentation of the ideal relationship between a man and a woman, depicted in prelapsarian Adam and Eve, has reinforced the idea that women were born to serve, obey, and adore men.

Most of all, though, Epstein has reinforced our appreciation of each other, our delight in our differences. We know that every English major at Denison will be in class with at least a half-dozen of us and probably many more. No one of us is responsible for teaching all the possibilities of approach and interpretation that enrich literary studies and keep literature alive and vigorous rather than embalmed and enshrined. If I choose to read Milton from a feminist point of view, my colleague Desmond Hamlet will balance that with traditional Protestantism, and Tony Stoneburner or David Baker will teach him as a poet. Perhaps there are schools where a party line is enforced by humorless thought police; Denison is not and I trust will never be such a place.

ANNE SHAVER
Professor of English
Denison University

Joseph Epstein replies:

Lovely to see someone as happy in her work as Professor Shaver. Reading her letter one cannot but think, Oh to be at Denison now that intellectual diversity is there, where colleagues, as she has it, "delight in our differences" and where the ultimate winners are those tender shoots, recipients of all these charmingly diverse points of view, the students. Such is teaching as Professor Shaver describes it. As it happens, I have just finished reading a batch—perhaps the wrong word, suggesting as it does cookies—of undergraduate papers, many of them written under the supervision of teachers of feminism just as happy in their work as Professor Shaver. I shall not regale the readers

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of *The Hudson Review* with several examples of the crudity with which the young apply the already quite crude doctrine they are taught, but only remark, taking my cue from one of these papers, that it seems a shame that William Faulkner didn't live long enough to have been straightened out on the subject of gender by someone named Annette Kolodny. At Northwestern as at Denison, it seems that we produce our own little shavers.

As for the factual matters raised in Professor Shaver's letter, the man I dealt with about my visit to Denison is named William Nichols, who was indeed on leave when I was there. I thought he was either the past chairman or soon-to-be chairman of the English department; I know he later became a dean at the school. If Professor Nichols was never chairman, I apologize for my error. It was at any rate he to whom I wrote asking if Denison couldn't come up with a better Jew. I regret only now learning that there were two other Jews in the English department whom I never met. Six more Jews and we could have had a *minyan.*

I took the homosexual I mentioned in my essay to be a youngish man who was in intellectual thrall to a combat-boot-wearing feminist. A peculiar breed, the male academic feminist, resembling nothing so much as those inmates of prisons and concentration camps who identify with their guards and captors, or so I have always thought. I don't want to end this paragraph without thanking Professor Shaver for the word *gaydar,* which is a new one on me. I assume that it's through the use of *gaydar* that one spots the *gayim.*

Finally, I was fascinated to learn that the secretary of the English department at Denison is a "fierce Marxist." In my experience the most intelligent person in most English departments is often the secretary, as the most intelligent person at many an Army post is the sergeant-major at headquarters company. Apparently not at Denison. With a fierce Marxist for a secretary, one can't help wondering if the janitor isn't a deconstructionist. My own hope is that, from the standpoint of departmental balance, he is an old-fashioned New Critic. Besides, if he is a deconstructionist, the building in which the English department at Denison is housed could itself be at risk.

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Comment:

Letter from Florence

Dear H,

When I visited the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine five years ago, the fresco cycle by Masolino, Masaccio, and Filippino Lippi in the Brancacci Chapel was sealed off behind green nets and scaffolding. A squashed, weepy light and muted voices were the signs of restorations still in progress. When the Chapel was finally reopened in 1990—the work began in 1984—the Italian press treated it with nearly the same attention and awe as it had treated Michelangelo's restored decorations in the Sistine, though without any polemics over methods and materials. I'd seen the panels many years ago when the colors were so fogged and the volumes so drained that the dimensions (and provocations) of Masaccio's contributions were thinned out to a phantasmal afterimage. It's powerfully evident in the restored murals that Masaccio was a heroic painter, maybe the first in Western painting, not because of the scale and grandeur of his conception, but by the massive, earthy moral presence enacted in sacred story. His pictorial idiom is densely modelled, mineralized, resolute, yet quickened with a feeling for the actual, and audacious in its expression of religious passion in the world.

The project was commissioned in 1423 by Felice Brancacci, a wealthy silk trader and prominent political figure in Florence. The job was given to Masolino, who took on Masaccio as his collaborator. Despite the difference in their ages—Masaccio was eighteen years younger—the two worked well together, sometimes painting different passages in the same panel. (They had already collaborated on a painting now in the Uffizi, *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne.*) Masolino was an elegant late Gothic painter, and Masaccio, as the guidebooks say, was the first humanist realist. What this means is that the two painters produced differently felt pictorial responses to sacred history. Style is the realization and completion of feeling, and when a quattrocento artist like Masaccio constructs perspective depths in images, he is punching new dimensions into the space sponsored by divinity. The imaged world seems at once a more expansive medium of divine intelligence and also, because of the pressurized spaces created by illusionist depth, more humanly separate and self-defining.

The Adam and Eve in Masolino's *Temptation* are courtly, serene figures canopied by boughs of the Tree of Knowledge; the serpent is a muscular vine of green light winding up the tree, its radiant

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curly-headed female face suspended between the two sinners. Adam and Eve are gracefully affectless, weightless in the medium of Paradise, their feet barely grazing the fiction of a ground. Their gazes crisscross, directed at a nowhere beyond the picture plane. As physical creatures they are neutral, placid. Appetite, god-envy, petulance, the restlessness of too much happiness, may all be elements in Eden's atmosphere, but they are certainly not compounded in Masolino's figures. Their innocence is palpable but looks like dreamy inconsequential curiosity.

In rebuilding the color planes and densities of the original frescos, the restorations have brought back to Masaccio's art a massiveness and voluminousness that make his *Expulsion*—the younger painter's answering image to his teacher's *Temptation*—an image of the change in the meaning of human existence. The First Ones, leaving the Golden Place, are deprived suddenly of stature, sight, buoyancy, curiosity, light. Adam's left leg, the first planted outside the garden gate, is inert and colossal, monumental in its eventfulness. Adam buries his head in his hands; his muscle-bound back is already a peasant's mulish implement. Eve's stumpy body cringes helplessly in an effort to cover her nakedness: panic and shame are one gesture. Her face is pinched in a cry of alarmed self-consciousness. That's the new terror, or rather the terror of the new humanism. Masaccio positions the red-gowned angel above and left of the pair, bulking out and pitching down upon them, deranging the compositional balance so pleasurably worked out in Masolino's *Temptation*. The salient balance in Masaccio's image is the parallelism of Adam's and Eve's extended legs: walking as effort, as labor and flight, is now their shared condition.

The collaborative shuffling involved in completing the decorations, which except for the *Temptation* and *Expulsion* dramatize scenes from the life of St. Peter, makes the Brancacci Chapel an index of historical forms. Masaccio had only half completed the large panel of St. Peter raising the son of Theophilus (the magistrate of Antioch who promised to free Peter from prison if he brought his son back to life) when he left for Rome in 1428, where he died soon thereafter at the age of twenty-six. Sixty years later the panel was finished, and others entirely executed, by Filippino Lippi, who deftly worked in concert with the color registers and deployment of figures begun by Masaccio. The figures Filippino contributed to the crowd gathered at Peter's miracle, however, show a sinuous contouring and unstable mass that make the scene more radiant, but also more ahistorical and idea-ridden, than Masaccio's intenser, deeper volumed figures of Theophilus and Peter. The robust, almost surly countenance of one witness far right on the panel, staring out as if to dare us not to believe the event, is Masaccio's self-portrait. He might just as well be daring us not to believe the *painting* event. Behind him, in profile, stands a figure said to be modelled on Brunelleschi, whose analysis of perspective guided the

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younger painter in his construction of these scenes and of the vaulted depth of the *Trinity* fresco in the Church of Santa Maria Novella.

Masaccio depicts holy events as acts of witness. In the episode of Peter's shadow, which had the power to heal, falling on a youth with withered legs, the figures are alert to consequence. Each contrives a different disposition of witness, from the hopeful piety of the ragged commoner kneeling at Peter's side, and the panting wonder of the afflicted boy, to the fatigued gravity of Peter himself. Masaccio paints the world's pitiless givenness, the crimps, sags, and ripples of stone and dirt and flesh. The browns and golds that darken and fold back on themselves in Peter's gown draw us into the scene as if the scenic were itself the substance of creation. These effects become spookier because of the bumpy uneven pitch of the chapel wall that enlivens the textures like some protoplasmic membrane. Masaccio is unlike both his elder collaborator and his successor in that he painted the force of holy personality, of unearthly power articulated in and through the body. The sturdy young men in *St. Peter Baptizing the Neophytes* are not posing in God's eye. The one being baptized has a simian bulk and slope in his shoulders that immediately identifies him as a descendant of the Adam and Eve on the other wall. Another stands in line shivering, his abdominal muscles rippled and tensed with cold. Masaccio paints this purification ritual as the submission of awful physical power to the power of promise conferred by Baptism.

Here and throughout the Chapel Masaccio's art is unequivocally dimensioned in the world. His decorations are so distinctive in part because they have no fluttery concern with overdetermined effects. Space is not ornamental, as it is in Filippino's later additions; it's a vault or block of time, an element that sustains suffering in history. In *The Tribute Money*, the episode in which Christ pays a tax with coins that St. Peter finds in the mouth of a fish, the disciples are grouped around Christ to form not only a mass of endorsement and loyalty but also, because of the deft perspective scheme, a ring of regard around a leader. They all look preoccupied, fatigued, a little beaten up by the world: they have saintly brown-gold discs stuck to their heads, but they look like dockworkers or peasants, their cunning charged with the mania of conversion. These are not charismatic individuals. Peter looks already oppressed by the charge soon to befall him. Their worldliness, their being-in-the-world, is modelled on moral intent. Their seriousness, almost glassy-eyed with effort, is a self-sustaining mechanism of persuasion; it will carry them long and far because, like Masaccio's style, there's no hysteria in it. Their faith is planted like a natural thing, like the sparsely leafed trees Masaccio has painted into the rocky Tuscan landscape behind them.

I'm writing in mid-February when in any normal year Florence belongs mostly to Florentines. But the war in the Persian Gulf has

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kept away even tourists who would otherwise be here in low season. The local economy is suffering and people are concerned about the approaching Easter holiday, which initiates high season. I've been to the Uffizi and Pitti galleries in February before, but I've never until last week been in those rooms alone. Hotels are laying off staff, cancellations are running to ninety percent in some places, and restaurant owners say that even Italians are staying home, close to family and television. A few experts are saying that now is the ideal time for Florence to review its own identity and to devise a master plan for controlling the tourist populations that will surely return once the war is over. The dilemma, as always, is that the masses of visitors pump oxygen into the city economy even while they smother the place. Leaving the Brancacci Chapel, despite all the cars parked in the Piazza del Carmine, and nearby in the open pedestrian zone of the Piazza Santo Spirito, you can see the dimensions and definitions of the Florentine spaces Masaccio and others took as models. A few months from now, if the war ends, that won't be possible.

No major exhibitions are held this time of year. There are few exhibitions of any kind, in fact, though the Palazzo Medici Riccardi is hosting a small didactic show called Van Gogh and the Hague School that documents and illustrates the two years Van Gogh spent in the Hague in 1882-1883. He had been there in the early 1870s employed as a menial clerk for the art dealer Goupil. ("Two years of black misery and hard work," he wrote to Theo.) He then worked in the mission field among miners in the Borinage in Belgium, where around 1878 he began drawing. In 1880 he decided to make his life as an artist, spent a short time in Brussels, then returned home to Etten where at Christmas in 1881 he quarreled so violently with his father that he was told to leave. Thus he ended up again in the Hague, which he would later describe as his second home.

The Hague already had an artistic identity. In the early 1870s painters like Anton Mauve, a senior eminence in Dutch painting and for a time Van Gogh's host and teacher, along with younger artists like Willem Maris, Jozef Israëls, Willem Roelofs, and Paul Gabriël were translating Barbizon *plein air*-ism into a northern idiom. (Roelofs and Israëls actually lived for a time in Barbizon.) By 1875 they were casually referred to as the Hague School, and it was this constellation of talents that the energetic, unformed, and no longer youthful Van Gogh entered. His first mission was to improve his drawing. He had in any event little choice, since he couldn't afford oil paints and didn't like watercolors. His letters to Theo percolate with enthusiasm for his contemporaries. "A painting by Mauve, Maris, or Israëls," he wrote, "expresses more, and more clearly, than does nature itself." The seventy works by the Hague School on display, arranged around eighteen by Van Gogh, illustrate the lessons he learned about composition, structure, perspective, modelling, and figuration, but the

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arrangement also dramatizes the passionate oddnesses of Van Gogh's early work.

Van Gogh brought the reformist ardor and spirit of social witness from his years in the Borinage to his new vocation. When he was commissioned to produce a set of views of the Hague, then much in demand, the work he produced was so unmarketable that he got no further commissions: he was attracted to working-class neighborhoods, third-class waiting rooms, poorhouses, and other unofficial subjects. One watercolor from 1882 is a view of a ditch where women are hanging wash on a fenceline; all we see of the prosperous Hague is the backs of houses in the distance. Although Hague School painters produced numerous genre pictures of the poor, they are usually cozy and patronizing. Van Gogh was the only artist to represent working-class housing projects, thousands of which existed at the time (and in one of which lived Sien Hoornik, the prostitute who became his companion and model) but which remained otherwise undocumented until they were photographed in the early twentieth century.

Van Gogh toiled, with manic attentiveness, to make himself into an artist, and toil was one of his early themes. Laundry women, peat haulers, potato grubbers, fisherfolk, sand diggers, women at domestic tasks—these were the figures he drew during his Hague sojourn. Though he had given up his social-religious activism, that passion fueled his artistic training. He was not very interested in still life and, surprisingly, did not fancy himself much of a landscape painter. It was the figure that obsessed him. He sketched working people by choice and necessity, because he could not afford sitters' fees. His 1882 drawing, *Sien Peeling Potatoes*, is moving and unsentimental. Chinless, with large blocky hands, Sien is a homely person whose attraction is rendered in the concentrated devotion to her small task. The woman and her labor are not patronized by style. Van Gogh's earnest, rough-and-ready draftsmanship frees his subject into unexpected feeling tones. While he learned some of the analytical dynamics of drawing from studying the work of his contemporaries, he did not borrow their preoccupation with calculated effects.

From Anton Mauve he learned perhaps his first major lessons in pictorial construction and painterly technique. He was stunned by Mauve's *Fishing Boat on the Beach* not only for its structure—we see horses pulling a large boat toward us, fanning out across the picture plane—but also for the handling, the tumbling muscular textures of sand, the heavy pigment dabs of light dappling the horses. And Mauve's *Flock of Sheep in the Snow*, which suppresses the dramatic perspective of the other picture but uses the same organization by concentrating dark masses in the center of brightly colored ground, churns the paint into unlikely surfing effects of violet-white snow engulfing the sheep herd. Some of Van Gogh's other enthusiasms are not so self-evident. He aspired to the painterly effects of Théophile de

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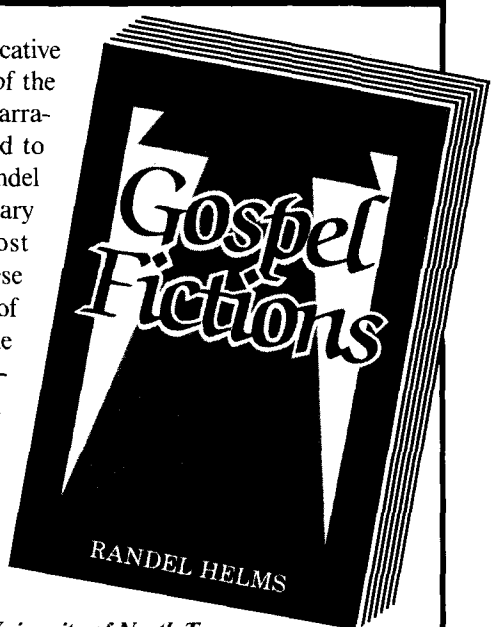

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Bock and H. J. van der Weele, though their work on exhibition here has few passages of grace. Their oil paintings are lumpily modelled, sluggish, and pedantic. In his letters Van Gogh hungrily and sometimes indiscriminately admires painterly effects, in large part because he was so anxious to work in oils. He called his drawing "painting in black and white."

He modelled his 1885 *Potato Eaters* (not included in the exhibition) on Israëls' genre scenes of poor families gathered around a frugal meal. The tones in Israëls' paintings are muted, almost buttery, and diffidently atmospheric. In 1902, when Van Gogh's reputation was growing, Israëls titled one of these scenes *Potato Eaters,* and this later painting is included along with earlier works of the type. The rough garb and faces of Israëls' peasants, gathered around the common bowl, are done in long streaked purplish flesh tones. Their faces register fatigue and tedium, but they are so conventionalized and drearily moody that they lack character. His *Potato Eaters* is a well-constructed, purposeful painting, but it has none of the frontal immediacy and rude intrusiveness of view that give Van Gogh's treatment of the subject its grotesque candor. Israëls paints spatial relations as demure, recondite atmospherics; in Van Gogh's painting, the brusque curtailments of space are expressions of communal appetite and want.

The face of the woman pouring coffee in Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters* translates the knobby melodramatic modelling of flesh in an engraving by M. W. Ridley called *The Miner,* which Van Gogh discovered in the English periodical *The Graphic.* He pored over back issues of the journal during his Hague years, and his many pencil drawings take over poses and structures he found in *Graphic* illustrations like H. Herkomer's *Old Age,* which depicts a mean settlement house for old women. He admired in these illustrations their starkness and clarity of draftsmanship, their panicked high relief; he also found, I think, the alert sympathetic witness to suffering and circumstance that he wanted to achieve in his own work. During his two years in the Hague he set out to make himself into a fairly conventional artist of social conscience and was intent on mastering conventional techniques which, as exercised by the Hague School, had no propulsive effect in the history of modern art. His genius was of a kind that put conventional technique and customary preoccupations to the task of overmastering themselves and being deranged by visionary desire.

Five years ago nearly half of Filippino Lippi's frescos in the Church of Santa Maria Novella's Strozzi Chapel were still behind wraps. Now that the restorations are finished, the entire space blazes with colors and crowds. It's the most dazzling and exasperating display in this city where so much art conducts itself with stern, measured flamboyance. Filippino finished his contributions to the Brancacci project around

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1482 and contracted in 1487 to decorate the chapel purchased by the wealthy banker Filippo Strozzi. He was ripe for the task. He trained as a young man with his father, Fra Filippo, and later worked with Botticelli, whose influence beams in Filippino's luminous, aggressively sharp drawing. Sometime around 1485, between the two major mural commissions, his work picked up some of Leonardo's softer, smoky colorism. The Strozzi assignment, however, brought his painting to a pitch of manic stylishness unlike anything he or any other Florentine artist had produced.

Filippino stipulated in his contract that he alone would execute all the figures and the major architectural motifs, leaving only small detail work to assistants. He knew that his formal signature lay in his figure drawing. One of the two main panels shows St. Philip exorcising a demon from the Temple of Mars in Hierapolis. The courtiers clustered on both sides of the Temple steps are a tumult of quivering garments and drooping heads registering nauseated dismay at the little knotted muscle of evil that has exploded from the altar porch. Filippino's signature is written out in the drenched, fringed hair, the bony brows knit by concern, the pearly skin tones and knobby anatomies. The architectural housing is feverishly elaborated. Pilasters and cornices are barnacled with shields, lances, masks, amphorae, flagpoles—all the *grotteschi* Filippino had seen in Rome at the excavations of the Golden House of Nero. The perspective modelling is wickedly adept: Filippino curls some ornaments back around their columns while peeling others forward. On the opposite wall, in the scene of St. John the Evangelist reviving Drusiana, we see the same trembling, windswept pitch of figures in a crowd witnessing miraculous event; but we also recognize here, as well as in St. John's martyrdom in one of the lunettes, figures brought over from the Brancacci murals. The slave stoking the fire under the pot in which St. John is cooking, is a ringer for the figure assisting in St. Peter's crucifixion in the Brancacci.

The crowds gathered at Drusiana's miracle look about to slide right off the wall, but for all the raciness of the drawing and the strategic deployment of groups, the force of witness so palpable in the Brancacci decorations, not only in Masaccio's potent images but also in Filippino's own *Crucifixion of St. Peter*, has dissipated into titillating decorousness. Technique has become unapologetically its own primary and all-absorbing occasion. Whatever desire Filippino may have felt to express sacred event in human history shivers away in a formal hysteria. The intelligence housed in the human figure, so happily expressed in Filippino's superb 1486 *Apparition of the Virgin to St. Bernard* in the Badia, has lost its grounding. The playful trickster intelligence smiling in the face of the angel that springs St. Peter from jail in one of Filippino's Brancacci panels, swims away with fluttery insouciance in the Strozzi murals. Filippino is sometimes called the first Mannerist, but even painters as idiosyncratic as Bronzino, Asper-

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tini, and Parmigianino claim in their figuration a grounding and fatefulness of consciousness. Filippino approaches the end of his career—he died in 1504 at the age of forty-six—with a rush of sheer, weightless nuance and overrefined gesture from which all the stark voluminous heft of sacred story has been drained. Close by the Strozzi Chapel is Masaccio's *Trinity,* where the canny perspective plan, technically *all there* for us to see, understand, and carry with us into time, still has the force of a felt instant of eternity. In Filippino's murals across the way, perspective dynamics are a nervy exaltation of technique freed from all suspicions of transcendence.

In 1490, the Duke of Milan engaged his agent in Florence to scout artists for a big project the Duke had in mind. The agent reported Filippino's work as having a "sweeter air" than Botticelli's (though not, he added, as much skill). That sweeter air, the clarity, delicacy, and grace of movement and line, binds all the elements in the sumptuous 1488 *Altarpiece of the Nerli Family* in the Church of Santo Spirito. In the Strozzi the sweet air turns sickening, but this also makes it, for me at least, a place to love and hate, because its perfections both fulfill and mock its ambitions. The thrill of such plenitude—the restored reds, blues, and golds quiver across the intonaco—is the kind that induces a headiness of wild vacancies and voluptuous inconsequentiality. The murals are monument to a time in Renaissance art when religious sensation self-consciously became merely the instigating precedent for an aesthetic event. In their fervid confidence and indulgences, Filippino's frescos are grotesque shipwrecked beauties.

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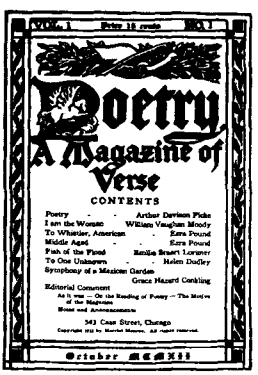

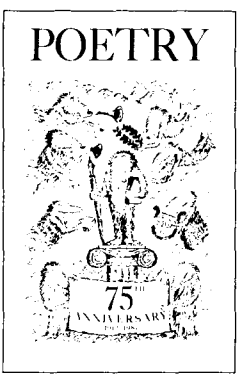

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WILLIAM TREVOR

In Co. Cork

All memory is grist to the fiction-writer's mill. The pleasure and the pain experienced by any storyteller's characters, the euphoria of happiness, the ache of grief, must of course be the storyteller's own. It cannot be otherwise and in that sense all fiction has its autobiographical roots, spreading through—in my case—a provincial world, limited and claustrophobic.

I grew up in what John Betjeman called "the small towns of Ireland"—in my case, Mitchelstown, cut down to size by the towering Galtee Mountains and the Knockmealdowns, Youghal by the sea, Skibbereen lost somewhere in the back of beyond.

There were others besides, but to these three in Co. Cork I go back often and look them over. Mitchelstown is still famous for its martyrs and its processed cheese, a squat little town, looking as though someone has sat on it. A good little business town, my father used to say, knowing about such matters.

Youghal, smartly elegant in my memory, is tatty on a wet afternoon. A carful of German tourists crawls along the seafront, the misty beach is empty. Once, people pointed here, and remarked; I listened and my eavesdroppings told of an afternoon love affair conducted on that brief promenade, he a married doctor, she a lady in disgrace. I see them now as I made them in my fascination: she is thin, and dressed in red, laughing, with pale long hair; he is Ronald Coleman with a greyer moustache. They smile at one another; defiantly he touches her hand. They are breathtaking in their sinning, and all their conversation is beautiful; they are the world's most exciting people.

I walk away from their romance, not wanting to tell myself that they were not like that. On the sands where old seaside artists sprinkled garish colors the rain is chilly. Pierrots performed here, and the man and woman who rode the Wall of Death sunned themselves at midday. From the Loreto Convent

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we trooped down here to run the end-of-term races, Sister Thérèse in charge. The sands haven't changed, nor have the concrete façades of the holiday boarding-houses, nor the Protestant church with its holes for lepers to peer through. But Horgan's Picture House is not at all as it was. It has two screens now and a different name, and there are sexual fantasies instead of Jack Hulbert in *Round the Washtub*.

In Youghal there was a man who shot himself in a henhouse. Life had been hell for this man, the voices whispered, and the henhouse, quite near the back of our garden, developed an eeriness that the chatter of birds made even more sinister. The henhouse isn't there any more, but even so as I stand where it was I shudder, and remember other deaths.

Youghal itself died in a way, for yellow furniture vans—Nat Ross of Cork—carted our possessions off, through Cork itself, westward through the town that people call Clonakilty God Help Us, to Skibbereen, at the back of beyond.

Memory focuses here, the images are clearer. Horses and carts in the narrow streets, with milk churns for the creamery. On fair-days farmers with sticks standing by their animals, their shirts clean for the occasion, without collar or tie. A smell of whiskey, and sawdust and stout and dung. Pots of geraniums among chops and ribs in the small windows of butchers' shops. A sun-burnt poster advertising the arrival of Duffy's Circus a year ago.

It was a mile and a half, the journey to school through the town, past Driscoll's sweetshop and Murphy's Medical Hall and Power's drapery, where you could buy oilcloth as well as dresses. In Shannon's grocery there was a man who bred smooth-haired fox-terriers. He gave us one once, a strange animal, infatuated by our cat.

In the town's approximate center, where four streets meet, a grey woman still stands, a statue of the Maid of Erin. E. O'Donovan, undertaker, still sells ice cream and chocolate. The brass plate of Redmond O'Regan, solicitor, once awkwardly high, is now below eye-level. In the grocers' shops the big-jawed West Cork women buy bread and sausages and tins of plums, but no longer wear the heavy black cloaks that made them seem like figures from another century. They still speak in the same West Cork lisp, a lingering careful voice, never in

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a hurry. I ask one if she could tell me the way to a house I half remember. "Ah, I could tell you grand," she replies. "It's dead and buried, sir."

The door beside the Methodist church, once green, is purple. The church, small and red-brick, stands behind high iron railings and gates, with gravel in front of it. Beyond the door that used to be green is the dank passage that leads to Miss Willoughby's schoolroom, where first I learnt that the world is not an easy-going place. Miss Willoughby was stern and young, in love with the cashier from the Provincial Bank.

On the gravel in front of the red-brick church I vividly recall Miss Willoughby. Terribly, she appears. Severe and beautiful, she pedals against the wind on her huge black bicycle. "Someone laughed during prayers," she accuses, and you feel at once that it was you, although you know it wasn't. *V. poor* she writes in your headline book when you've done your best to reproduce, four times, perfectly, *Pride goeth before destruction.*

As I stand on the gravel, her evangelical eyes seem again to dart over me without pleasure. Once I took the valves out of the tyres of her bicycle. Once I looked in her answer book.

I am late, I am stupid. I cannot write twenty sentences on A Day in the Life of an Old Shoe. I cannot do simple arithmetic or geography. I am always fighting with Jasper Swanton. I move swiftly on the gravel, out on to the street and into the bar of the Eldon Hotel: in spectral form or otherwise, Miss Willoughby will not be there.

Illusions fall fast in the narrow streets of Skibbereen, as elsewhere they have fallen. Yet for me, once, there was something more enduring, nicest thing of all. Going to Cork it was called, fifty-two miles in the old Renault, thirty miles an hour because my mother wouldn't permit speed. On St. Stephen's Day to the pantomime in the Opera House, and on some other occasion to see the *White Horse Inn*, which my father had heard was good. In Cork my appendix was removed because Cork's surgical skill was second to none. In Cork my tongue was cut to rid me of my incoherent manner of speaking. To Cork, every day of my childhood, I planned to run away.

Twice a year perhaps, on Saturday afternoons, there was going to Cork to the pictures. Clark Gable and Myrna Loy in *Too Hot to Handle. Mr. Deeds Goes to Town.* No experience in my

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whole childhood, and no memory, has remained as deeply etched as these escapes to the paradise that was Cork. Nothing was more lovely or more wondrous than Cork itself, with its magnificent array of cinemas, the Pavilion, the Savoy, the Palace, the Ritz, the Lee, and Hadji Bey's Turkish Delight factory. Tea in the Pavilion or the Savoy, the waitresses with silver-plated teapots and buttered bread and cakes, and other people eating fried eggs with rashers and chipped potatoes at half-past four in the afternoon. The sheer sophistication of the Pavilion or the Savoy could never be adequately conveyed to a friend in Skibbereen who had not had the good fortune to experience it. The Gentlemen's lavatory in the Victoria Hotel had to be seen to be believed, the Munster Arcade left you gasping. For ever and for ever you could sit in the middle stalls of the Pavilion watching Claudette Colbert, or Spencer Tracy as a priest, and the earthquake in San Francisco. And for ever afterwards you could sit while a green-clad waitress carried the silver-plated teapot to you, with cakes and buttered bread. All around you was the clatter of life and of the city, and men of the world conversing, and girls' laughter tinkling. Happiness was everywhere.

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Letters to Ferdinand Reyher

Edited with an Afternote by Holly Stevens

Highland Court Hotel, Hartford.
June 3rd, 1916.

Dear Reyher:

Will you be good enough to get Allen Norton's exact address on W. 11th Street for me? I shall be grateful to you.

We are at this hotel for several weeks. About the end of the month we go to Farmington for the summer, where I hope to see you. More on that score, later. I miss New-York abominably but Mrs. Stevens, with murderous indifference, pretends that Hartford is sweet to her spirit. But I expect to like Farmington. We are to have a decent house for a few months, which will give us an opportunity to [seek? or search?] for something permanent.

It is very nice of you to publish your things in the *New-Republic*. I could hear your voice in the story of the Irishman. It was like a statue in a world of step-ladders.

Auf wiedersehen und wiedersprechen,
W. Stevens

[Hillsboro Hotel, Tampa, Florida]
Thursday, Nov. 15, 1917.

My dear Reyher:

Your recent letter was forwarded to me in Hartford and reached me just in time to tuck in my bag. I have often wondered where you were. My address is c/o Hartford Acci-

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dent & Indemnity Co., 125 Trumbull-Street, Hartford, where I should be glad to hear from you, although never again, I hope, with such dreadful news as that of your marriage. Yet now that your state is established, there is nothing left but to give three cheers. I hope that I shall have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Reyher. There are a number of odds and ends that I should like to mention to her. Sincerest best wishes. I enclose a number of post-cards, useful as bookmarks in the family bible. The Wisconsin Players have returned to Milwaukee, thank God. Their turbulent fortnight at the Neighborhood Playhouse taught me something, I believe; but otherwise, it was pretty stiff stuff. However, the plays were undoubtedly to blame, in part. One of them, Carlos, will be published in *Poetry*, in the December number.[1] If you read it, you will have no difficulty in imagining the feelings of a Russian damsel among the bolsheviki . . . *Why don't you try the theatre? It is far more important than books. Stop to think of it.* . . . But Florida is uppermost in my mind, as always when I am here. You have never been here, have you? Everything down here is amazingly inexpensive: can be [illegible word] just the opposite. So that, for [2 illeg. words], you can live under the [illeg. word or words] circumstances. The warmth, the light, the flowers and water and sky [2-4 illeg. words] are constant. Will-o, one of these days I shall telephone you in Philadelphia.

Very sincerely yours,
Wallace Stevens.

Sept. 25
1 9 2 0

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher
308 Twelfth Ave.,
Belmar, N. J.

Dear Reyher:

I am really glad to hear from you again. It is quite possible that I shall be in New York before you sail, and, if so, I shall

[1] *Carlos among the Candles*, written for the Wisconsin Players. See *LWS*, pp. 189–90, 202–3, and footnotes. See also *Opus Posthumous*, new edition, revised, enlarged, corrected, edited by Milton J. Bates (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), pp. 163–167.

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send word to you, particularly since I know a place where the potato sauterne[2] is both good and inexpensive. I have often thought of you when I have been in Philadelphia.

If it should turn out that we are not able to get together before you go, let me know where you are in England. I might want to send you some money and ask you to buy odds and ends for me, provided you care to do so. John Rodker has been doing this for me, and I hate to bother him. He has a private press,[3] on which he has printed some (possibly all) of the most distinguished things that have appeared in England during the last year. He is both creative and procreative, and his own volume of Hymns, which was one of the last things to come from his press, combines these two libidos to such an extent that it is necessary to keep the book hidden in the piano. You might like to have a note to him.

Sincerely yours,
Wallace Stevens

125 Trumbull St.
Hartford, Conn.
Oct. 6, 1920

Mr. John Rodker
43 Belsize Park Gardens
Hampstead, London, England

Dear Mr. Rodker:

Ferdinand Reyher, who brings this, is a friend of mine from Philadelphia whom I should like to introduce to you. Mr. Reyher is going to spend a little time in London. You can find out a good deal about this part of the world from him, and I have no doubt that he can find out about your part from you.

I don't know that I know you well enough myself to be introducing my friends to you; but after reading that admirable book of "Hymns" I shall take a chance.

Very truly yours,
[signed, Wallace Stevens]

[2] A euphemism for "moonshine"?

[3] The Ovid Press. See *Letters of Wallace Stevens* (New York, 1966), Letter 240 (cited below in note 15), *n.* 3 (p. 221).

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c/o Hartford Accident & Indemnity Co.
125 Trumbull St.
Hartford, Conn.
Use this address. U.S.A.
[November 23, 1920]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
c/o Chicago Tribune Office,
125 Pall Mall, London, England.

Dear Reyher:

I was greatly relieved to have your post card from Büdingen, because I thought it barely possible that my not meeting you in New York might have led to some misunderstanding. I have to go to a good many out-of-the-way places in a hurry, and, while I am in New York frequently, I cannot always be there when I want to be.

I enclose a draft for twenty pounds. Of course you won't be able to buy the whole of London with so small a draft, but if you conduct your operations on my account with a view to getting the following odds and ends I shall be satisfied.

I have always been interested in honey, as you know. I think that you and I dabbled in a pot of it when I met you in Washington. Well, the other day Amy Lowell was here, and told me that there was, and probably is, a large grocery store in Piccadilly, between some place or other and Berkeley Square, where they sell honey from Sicily in jars, or jugs, or pots, or something or other. I shouldn't mind having a whack at it. Generally speaking, groceries have considerable interest for me, particularly poetic nuts, apples from the Tyrol, and so on. I may say, however, that I despise plum pudding. Yet, if in your search for the honey you were to find a lot of things, you might ask the bloody grocer to make a nice little package and send it to me.

The next thing that I am keen about is catalogues of prints and pictures, but particularly illustrated ones. For instance, there is an exhibition of Spanish paintings going on in London at the present time. If you happen to go to it, get an extra catalogue for me. Last winter the Burlington Fine Arts Club, which seems to hive in Burlington House, had an exhibition of

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Central American things. I wanted very much to write for a copy of the catalogue, but was not able to find an address.

There is a gallery called the Chelsea Book Club. I have no way of telling how important these various galleries are, but I should judge that the Chelsea Book Club cut some ice. They had a big show of Augustus John's etchings last winter. I shouldn't mind having one of his etchings; but the chances are that they are tremendously expensive.

I wish also that I had a list of the publications of the British Museum, at least of the Department of Prints. There is a man by the name of Lucien Pissarro, a son of Camille Pissarro, who lives in London at the present time and who has made some rather desirable wood cuts. You might keep an eye open for one or two of these.

Now, on the subject of books.—The new things I buy direct. But there are one or two things that are not new which it seems impossible for me to get over here. For instance, I should like to have a copy of Vernon Lee's "Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy." There was a second edition of this published in 1906 which would do very nicely. I should also like to get a copy of Philippe Monnier's "Venice in the Eighteenth Century." This was published by Chatto and Windus in 1910. If you are able to get a copy of Goldoni's "Memoirs" translated by John Black, two volumes, London, 1814, or of anything else respectable relating to life in Venice in the eighteenth century, I should be glad to have it.

Finally, Bernard Quaritch, of 11 Grafton St., is agent in London for the books of Herbert A. Giles. If it is possible to procure from him a copy of Giles's "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio," send it along. This book was published by Kelly and Walsh, of Shanghai, from whom I have been unable to procure it. The only copy I have ever seen was printed on rice paper and bound in silk. If Quaritch has a copy, and if it is printed on rice paper and bound in silk, for God's sake don't get it.

If you cannot get any of these things, then I think that under the head of general instructions I might specify Italian prints. You know, the print dealers tell you that the old prints are very much cheaper than new ones, and then they show you things that cost $100 or $200, and so on. But there are so many more

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prints in the print shops of London than there are in those of New York that it may really be the case that one could pick up three or four very decent things for little money.

I have tried not to suggest things that will take you out of your way. You will naturally be going to museums, etc., on your own accounts, and all I want is to have you buy an extra copy for me of things you are interested in yourself. For instance, at the Victoria and Albert there are a good many excellent hand books. The manual on Japanese prints published by that museum was for a long time the only reliable authority on the subject.

I do not intend to bombard you during the winter with further requests, because that would be rubbing it in, and, besides, there are too many things over here on which to spend one's money. So, therefore, you can regard this as the sum and substance of the trouble I am going to put you to. If there is anything that I can do for you over here while you are away, let me know, for I shall be delighted to do it. And in any case let me hear from you now and then.

Sincerely,
Wallace Stevens

Enc.

125 Trumbull Street
Hartford, Conn.
U.S.A.
[January 31, 1921]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
Mermaid Hotel,
Rye, Sussex, England

Dear Reyher:

I am really greatly relieved to have your post-card. So sensible of you not to sweat about my things. I hadn't the faintest idea what you were doing in England, if anything. But even at that I hadn't expected that you would try to fulfill literally every demand made on you. My idea simply was to mention everything I wanted, or thought I wanted, and have

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you knock them off as you went around, if you went around. Take your time, old sock.

While of course I should have been delighted to have the Johns drawing, I am just as delighted not to have it. It would have been an extravagance; but one is extravagant all the time. However, I particularly don't want to be for the next month or two, because the income tax falls due shortly, and it rather makes a dent in one. I leave the whole thing to you. If you feel like being extravagant, go ahead. It isn't as if you were trustee.

I should be charmed to do anything that I can for you over here. When you ask me to send you two or three significant magazines every now and then, you are asking for an impossibility. Carlos Williams has just started a thing called Contact. Now that I have your address I shall have it sent to you. It rests on a good idea. But it was so good that they are trying to explain it away. The idea of developing a purely American strain is not wunderschön. Aber, lieber Gott, the result would be, after all, nothing more than a purely American strain. The owner of Foxgrapes, Brodsky, is publishing a magazine this winter called Rainbow. It is on the bum. Hamilton Field is publishing a thing called The Arts. Hot air. I believe that Walter Arensberg and his retinue contemplate a thing to resemble the Atlantic Monthly. But this summum bonum is still in process of gestation. I don't know whether you know Harold Loeb, who has been associated with Mrs. Mowbray-Clark of New York. He really has about the right idea. He is thinking of starting something that won't be so damned serious—Oh! Sal, the butcher's wife ate clams, and died amid uproarious damns. I suppose you see the Dial.—Mere literary foppery; of course intensely successful. Yet any one who is in direct communication with the other side gets it all a year or two before it comes out in the Dial.

What you say about the difference in quality between European and American work is old song. I don't think the difference is due, as you say, to the fact that the European produces something with professional quality. But the next dull Sunday afternoon we have to spend together in Switzerland, we can discuss this in the hotel parlor. Literary theorizing is my idea of nothing to do.

I see a great deal of Pitts Sanborn when I go to New York. He

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is about to bring out a volume of poems. Some of them are so stale that it is like reading fly dirt. But there is a good deal of incandescence in the old horse yet. I have stored a case of brandy in his cellar, hoping that the idea will invigorate him and get him away from sonnets on Phryne, and so on. Why anybody should write sonnets on Phryne when he can disguise himself as a laundryman and take in Mary Garden's wash I haven't any idea. I met Alfred Kreymborg in New York one day last week. Alfred ate seven dollars' worth of lunch, and the chances are that he will now get through the winter.

I am very much interested to hear that Rodker is in Paris. I have been owing him a letter for about two months. I don't write purposely either to him or to you frequently, because I like the thing to go on. It is so easy to knock a pleasant arrangement like this into a cocked hat by keeping it up, rubbing it in, having a man always in debt to you for a letter, and so on. Let's take it easy and enjoy ourselves.

Sincerely,
Wallace Stevens

Mar. 16
1 9 2 1

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
c/o Chicago Tribune,
125 Pall Mall,
London, England

Dear Reyher:

A friend of mine here desires to buy a copy of George Moore's "Abelard and Heloïse." The enclosed letters will explain why he can't get it by mail. I don't know how much of a balance you have to my credit, but I assume that you have five guineas at least. Will you, therefore, buy this book and send it to Peter A. McCallum, 24 Wellington St. East, Toronto, Ont.? If I am mistaken about the balance to my credit, and if you are not so hard up that you can advance the necessary sum for me, will you do so, relying on my reimbursing you immediately? I shall

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be glad to have you drop me a line as soon as the book has been posted, so that I can get in touch with Mr. McCallum.

I mean to write you again shortly. The Vernon Lee book came, and I am delighted to have it. However, the weather has taken such a remarkable turn here that one doesn't care much about Vernon Lee. We are in the middle of March, with robins, crocuses, and all the rest of the paraphernalia.

Yours truly,
Wallace Stevens

125 Trumbull St.,
Hartford, Conn.
U.S.A.
[May 13, 1921]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
6, Old Coastguards' Cottages,
Sennens Cove, Land's End,
Cornwall, England.

Dear Reyher:

Don't waste your time settling Contact's hash by letter. McAlmon, who is at the bottom of it, is now in London, or was when I last heard from him, at 1 South Audley St., W. He married an English girl several months ago, and is now savoring his new family. According to the newspapers, it is a family of considerable savor. I have never met McAlmon, any more than I have met Rodker. But I used to write to him a good deal when he was in New York. He is evidently a youthful enthusiast, rather addicted to his own views when these happen to be à la mode. But youthful enthusiasm is not a thing to be sneezed at nowadays. I imagine that if, when you are next in London, you drop him a note, tell him that you are a friend of mine, and ask him to come around for a drink (you can charge the drink to me if there is anything left to my credit), you might find him quite likable.

A good many friends of mine are going to be on the other side this summer. I don't know whether you ever met Pitts Sanborn. He sailed yesterday on the France, and will be in

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France all summer. Pitts has a very large acquaintance in Paris. His address is c/o American Express Company, 11 rue Scribe. Alfred Kreymborg is going over about the first of June. At least, he was at last accounts. I haven't his address, except that it is care of some bank, Sconto something or other, in Florence. He is going to be there for a year. Harold Loeb is going with him. They are going to publish in Florence or in Rome a magazine to be called the Broom. It is to be published in English, and, from what I have seen of their plans, it ought to be well worth while. By the way, the last time I saw Alfred in New York I told him about Rodker, and asked him why they didn't make Rodker some kind of offer, and, if they could come to terms, take him down to Florence to get out their magazine for them. Something might come of this. Alfred hasn't any money, but Loeb has, and he is really a very decent fellow. Both of them are ambitious artistically. The trouble with my idea in relation to Rodker is that there are, as I understand it, some pretty good English printers already in Florence.

Since last writing to you, Contact seems to have ceased publication. I sent it to you merely to help the thing along. As a matter of fact, the idea back of Contact is a valid and interesting one. But McAlmon was afraid of it in its simplicity, and tried to make it larger than it was, and more abstract than it was, thus ruining it. There have been several numbers of a poetry magazine called the Measure. This has so far contained nothing of importance or interest. The fact is that notwithstanding the large amount of poetry that is written over here at the moment there is practically no aesthetic theory back of it. Why do you scorn free verse? Isn't it the only kind of verse now being written which has any aesthetic impulse back of it? Of course, there are miles and miles of it that do not come off. People don't understand the emotional purpose of rhythm any more than they understood the emotional purpose of measure. I am not exclusively for free verse. But I am for it. However, all this kind of thing I should rather talk about than write about. When do you expect to come over here? I should like to take a day or two off after you have met your family, and find what you have found out.

I have received the Vernon Lee book and the Gauguin book. I have not received the German picture nor the Heloïse. But

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these may come in at any moment. Books come through rather more quickly than anything else. Prints and that kind of thing must often be appraised, and that sometimes takes considerable time even though the appraised value is slight. I am glad to have the Gauguin book. But it happens to be the case that Gauguin has attracted a good deal more attention than any of his general group in this country. He is by no means so interesting as Matisse, and one or two others who remain enigmas. I have read practically everything about Cézanne that has been published here, and have seen every picture available. But I am bound to say that I have not heard a word of common sense on the subject yet. They are having a big exhibition of this school at the Metropolitan. It will be on until September 15.

I don't know how serious you are about what you want. It will cost you quite a little money to get a complete file of Poetry. The same thing is true of Reedy's Mirror. I can come pretty near giving you a complete set of the Little Review, and shall be glad to do it if you really want it. It is stored away. But I shall be glad to get it out for you and send it over. Let me know whether you really want these things or if you are merely kidding me. If you really want them, I shall do what I can to get them for you.

A number of things which I may have asked you to get have come in from other sources. Monnier's Venise came after a year's search. I have also received a foolish set of Goldoni's Memoires, extra-illustrated, with newspaper clippings mounted and bound in as if they were the real thing. I don't know what your plans are, and how much you have spent on my account, nor whether you need more money. If you do, let me know, because this is the opportunity of a lifetime. Don't subscribe for any magazines for me. I subscribe for quite a number of them myself, because it is necessary to do so here in Hartford, where nothing can be picked up. There have been some good American novels recently, so they say. The next time I am in New York I am going to send you one or two. It seems to be that Cabell's Jurgen[4] is obtainable, but expensive.

[4] James Branch Cabell, *Jurgen: A Comedy of Justice*, with illustrations and decorations by Frank C. Papé and an introduction by Hugh Walpole. London, John Lane, The Bodley Head Limited, 1921. Edition limited to 3000 copies.

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Pitts Sanborn got a copy somewhere some time ago. I have never read it. Cabell used to write for Harper's years ago, and of all the loathsome, sentimental piffle that Harper's has contained his was the worst. I don't believe that because he happened to write something about sex there will be anything more to it than usual. You know, we have reached a point about sex where we can put it in our pipes and smoke it.

This is such a fat, buoyant letter from you that I must be overlooking odds and ends in it. I am delighted to have it. But if on further reading I find that I have still more ground to cover, I shall write you again. Keep in touch with me, old man. Thanks for your many kindnesses.

Sincerely,
Wallace Stevens

125 Trumbull St.,
Hartford, Conn.
U.S.A.
[June 1, 1921]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
125 Pall Mall,
London, Eng.

Dear Reyher:

I have sent word to a number of the publishers,—the important ones, anyhow,—to send you their lists, and you ought to be receiving them shortly, although the mail seems to be as slow as the devil nowadays. That is because I am still waiting for Abélard and Heloïse. Not that I would ever read such bunk myself! When I was in New York a week or so ago, in a sober moment I sent you a copy of Miss Lulu Bett. This seems to be rather well liked. I had also intended to send you a copy of Main Street, by Sinclair Lewis. But this appears to be published by Hodder and Stoughton in London, and I might be wasting good money by trying to get a copy in. Main Street is regarded as the best book of the spring. It has been so successful that Lewis now has photographs taken on deck just

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before he sails. This makes one feel like the driver of an ice wagon in a small town.

What really has impelled me to write to you today is the appalling, devastating news of the death of Donald Evans. He died in Bellevue Hospital last Friday, and was buried in Philadelphia Monday, Decoration Day. I take it for granted that you know him, since both of you were from Philadelphia. His last year was an unbelievably stormy one. Early last fall, I believe, his wife ran away with a lounge lizard. He went to Bermuda to recuperate, and came back better than ever. But I suppose the truth to be that he was much more deeply stricken than one's frivolous eye disclosed. He was one of the great ironists, one of the pure littérateurs. But of course I don't want to write an essay about him. I merely want to tell you that he is dead.

More later.

Sincerely,
Wallace Stevens

Trumbull St.,
Hartford, Conn.
U.S.A.
[June 4, 1921]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
c/o Chicago Tribune,
125 Pall Mall,
London, England.

Dear Reyher:

I think I forgot to tell you about Jurgen. The price for the book in New York ranges from twelve to forty dollars, unless one is able to borrow a copy. But I am told that there is a man here in Hartford who can produce a copy for $10.00. If you want the book as badly as all that, let me know, and I shall get it and send it to you. You can tell me just how much you are willing to part with for it, and I shall get it as reasonably as possible, and tell you what I pay for it, and then you can credit me with that amount in pounds, shillings, and pence.

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The Abélard and Heloïse has not yet arrived. Neither has the German drawing. But that is not your funeral. I take the risk of the safe arrival of anything that you send.

I was in New York again since writing you, and walked around your part of town, East 19th St. Ach, du lieber Gott! You might as well have a good time, old man, while you are in England, because you never can have it there: East 19th St.

Sincerely,
W. Stevens

WS/DEH

125 Trumbull St.,
Hartford, Conn.
U.S.A.
[June 30, 1921]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
c/o Chicago Tribune,
125 Pall Mall,
London, England.

Dear Reyher:

There are just one or two things that I want to send you word about. First of all, the Abélard and Heloïse books have reached Toronto, and you may dismiss them from your mind. Mr. McCallum will see that they reach me safely. But I am completely in the dark regarding the payment for them. Sotheran & Company charged them to Stryker's account. This, I suppose, followed the presentation of your bum check. Recently you wrote, saying that you intended to send another check. Now, I don't know whether you have sent another check and whether Sotheran's has been paid twice and whether Stryker's account has been credited, or what the devil the situation is. Moreover, I don't know whether to collect from Stryker.[5] Finally, I don't know how much the books cost. I understand

[5] Probably Heber H. Stryker, an insurance colleague of Stevens, and neighbor after my parents moved to Hartford in 1916. See *LWS*, Letter No. 176, and footnote, and other references (in index).

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that they cost five guineas. Stryker says that they only cost three. I wish you would write me eight or ten pages about this and get it straight.

Second, I think we shall have to post the Morganer as perdu. I have not heard a word about it, and so much time has elapsed that I don't expect to.

And, finally, I want to ask whether you see the Literary Review. This is a literary supplement to the New York Evening Post, published on Saturday evenings. It is like the book review of the New York Times, but infinitely better. If you would like to have it, I will subscribe to it for you, because I believe that the only way to stir you up is to heap coals of fire on your head. What puts it in my mind is that there have been several recent letters from Mr. Hueffer which contained a good deal about yourself and Rodker and your recent trip to his demesne. Your name was spelled throughout "Reyber". But in last Saturday's issue Pierre Loving, whom I don't know, although I have had letters from him, had a letter correcting Reyber to Reyher, and referring to you as a redoubtable novelist, and so on, which sets the public straight. But, what is more, it requires you to make good. Haven't you ten or fifteen two-volume novels that you can throw on the market right now?

And by way of P. S., I have had several interesting letters from McAlmon recently. The evolution of this youth is one of the most extraordinary things going on in the world today. A few months ago this particular almond could not be told from a hazel nut. I understand from the Dial that when he arrived in England with Sir John Ellerman's daughter, Sir John met him at the dock sword in hand; that is to say, well scabbarded, but nevertheless in a posture calculated to knock the eye of this innocent clean out of his skull. But he rallies like the devil. He has been all over Europe since then, and is now spending his time in Paris, studying French by day and practicing it by night, a boon companion of James Joyce. Moreover, he writes me that he is going to spend the last two weeks in August bicycling with Wyndham Lewis in southern France. Oh, Jesu, Maria, Pietro, and Paolo!

Sincerely,
Wallace Stevens

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Hartford, Conn., U.S.A.
[October 28, 1921]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
125 Pall Mall,
c/o Chicago Tribune,
London, England.

Dear Reyher:

Now that the letter-writing season has opened again, it might be well for me to drop you a note merely for the sake of getting a reply. During the summer I received the book on Milton. The pages looked like Japanese representations of rain. What particularly interested me, however, was the fact that you sent it in a laundry bag. Fancy their having laundry bags just like ours in London! I meant to keep the bag and present it to the Historical Society here. They have all manner of things under glass cases. How nice it would be to put the bag under one, and label it "Laundry Bag from London, presented by Ferdinand Reyher, Esq., after the last time he had his laundry done." I assume that that was the last time you had your laundry done, for almost everybody that I have seen this fall after a trip to Europe seems to have come home without any laundry. I suppose the reason you do not write to me any more is that you are shamed to go out of the house, not having anything to wear. Mrs. Stevens and I spent several days in New York last week attending the theatre. The fact that they had nothing to wear seemed to have no bearing on the attendance of some of the people in the theatre. But the English are always frightfully prudish. Couldn't you drop a letter from the window? Now, I suppose that in reply I shall get a letter from you enclosing a photograph of you in a top hat, taken at Madrid or some such place, just to prove how ill-founded my suspicions are. Anyhow, I hope so. Let me know what you are doing. Putnam is advertising your novel quite generously. I meant to get a copy when I was in New York, but overlooked it. There was a very decent little review in the New York Times a month or so ago.

What has become of Rodker? I expected to receive from him some time ago a copy of Bacon's Essays.[6] You know how one

[6] *The Essays of Francis Bacon.* Tolz, Bremer Presse, 1920. My father's copy was #210.

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pants to read Bacon's Essays. Well, if you are naked, I am all pants, for I have never received the book, and the worst of it is, I suppose, that Rodker has been gobbled up by the Bolsheviki or some other anti-literary coterie.

Sincerely yours,
Wallace Stevens

Dec. 30
1 9 2 1

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
c/o Chicago Tribune,
125 Pall Mall,
London, England.

Dear Reyher:

I am not going to write to you again until I have read your book, which has been on my table at home for a month. The object of this note is merely to let you know that I had the Washington Square Book Shop forward a copy of Mencken's American Language[7] to you, care of the Chicago Tribune, 125 Pall Mall, yesterday. I did not like to send it to the Hotel Adlon because for all I know that was merely a temporary address. However, I am sending you a carbon of this note to the Hotel Adlon. This will enable you to write to the Tribune office, asking them to forward the book to you in case that is necessary. It cost six real American dollars, which you can work out in exchange of some sort.

Very truly yours,
Wallace Stevens

WS/DEH

[7] H. L. Mencken, *The American Language: A Preliminary Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States.* New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1919.

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690 Asylum Ave.,
Hartford, Conn. U.S.A.
[February 2, 1922]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
c/o Chicago Tribune,
125 Pall Mall,
London, England.

Dear Reyher:

I have now read your book. Of course, you are interested chiefly in pure narrative, and from that point of view your book is all that you intended it to be. Reading one's friends' books is a good deal like kissing their wives, I suppose. The less said about it, the better. The truth is that I am always horribly embarrassed by either job. But I am going to let it go by simply saying that the book excited me, as a good story should, and that, except for your absurd remark about the point of view of bushwhackers in art museums, was thoroughly digestible and agreeable. I have had three or four books sent to me by rowdies that I know during the last few months, as a consequence of which I start at the slightest sound. However, the other books were books of poetry, which probably accounts for my unstrung condition, although there have been a good many contributory causes of unstrungedness. When I was in Miami, I sent you a postcard. Now that trip to Florida would have unstrung a brass monkey. I went down there with half a dozen other people from Atlanta. I was the only damned Yankee in the bunch. I was christened a charter member of the Long Key Fishing Club of Atlanta. The christening occupied about three days, and required just two cases of Scotch. When I started home, I was not able to tell whether I was traveling on a sound or a smell. As I remember it, it was very much like a cloud full of Cuban senoritas, cocoanut palms, and waiters carrying ice-water. Since my return I have not cared much for literature. The southerners are a great people.

I don't know of any news. At least, one always starts out by saying that. Alfred Kreymborg, as you probably know, is in Rome, and William Carlos Williams is in Rutherford, N.J. Walter Arensberg is in Los Angeles, and Pitts Sanborn is in

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New York. The Provincetown Players are producing Arthur Ficke's "Dr. Faustus." A book of souvenirs of Donald Evans is going to be published shortly. Allen Norton is a reporter on the World, or was the other day. Mrs. Norton is still in New York. Just where Charles Demuth is I don't know. He held an exhibition in the fall at the Daniel Gallery. His piece was two smoke-stacks, which he called "Aucassin and Nicolette." But I have got far away from the art crowd. Only the other day I got together all my catalogues, which were really a pretty complete survey of what had been shown in New York for the last ten years, and sent them to the museum here in Hartford.

Very likely by the time this reaches you you will be having the first intimations of spring. They have been in the air here the last few days. They had a tremendous storm in eastern Pennsylvania Friday and Saturday. When I arrived in Hartford, I found that scarcely a flake of snow had fallen. Since then the air has been relaxed, as it always is after a storm, and the last few evenings have been really poetic. Spring came here last year early in March. Here we are in February already, and I feel as though we shall shortly be out of the woods.

Let me have a letter from you.

Sincerely,
Wallace Stevens

690 Asylum Ave.,
Hartford, Conn., U.S.A.
[April 6, 1922]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,
Büdingen (Oberhessen),
Germany.

Mon Vieux:

Your letter of March 22 made a record trip. It was on my desk on the morning of April 1. But Good God, man! What a letter! You want me to send you about $500 for books. Do you realize that the income tax was payable in March? Or don't you bother about the income tax? I do, and I bother like the devil about it. I paid mine in a lump sum this year, and it has left me

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without much ready money. But aside from the income tax I have had other exceptional expenses. For one thing, Mrs. Stevens had a portrait in bronze completed. Then, there have been a whole lot of other odds and ends, and, really, I simply cannot do it. We are planning to go to New York in the middle of this month, and I expect that while there I shall spend the greater part of $500.

Of course, I should like to do it if I could. I know just how you felt when you had the books put to one side, and when you wrote to me. That is the way I feel every time I come near a decent collection. Still, one outgrows it. For instance, I have outgrown the [Hans Von] Maree portfolios, and have not the slightest desire to possess one. When I first saw them, I wanted them all,—unquestionably superb reproductions. I remember buying one of the Renoirs. Weyhe had broken up a set. But the fact remains that these are nothing but reproductions, and they come in the same category as Rogers' groups and other parlor art. I know that there is a lot to be said about this. But I am not attempting to say more than what I personally think. Nothing would be pleasanter than to have these portfolios around. But I have no desire to own one. Besides, the prices mentioned by you are really very high. You speak of getting some out-of-print albums at anywhere from 15 to 25 or 30 pounds. Weyhe's last catalogue contains the Renoir and the Durer at $80.00. Whoever is selling these to you is asking you the top price. You are not making a shilling by buying them in Germany. In my own case I should have all the risk and trouble of getting them here.

Rodker offered me the Bremer Dante some time ago. I decided not to buy it, so that I could not very well turn around and buy it from somebody else. The only things in your list that I really crave are Klenken's Presse Evangelium Sancti Johannis, and the Cranach. The Hamburg Press Platon may be all that you say it is. But, after all, a book is not only a piece of printing. It has a soul as well as a body, and the idea of Plato in German is something so odious, so vulgar, that I turn from it as quickly as possible. I am familiar with most of the odds and ends mentioned by you. The prices are all frightfully high, and, besides, there is nothing there that I really want. The Menzel Mappe might be most interesting. But to place Menzel next to Dürer seems like crowding the mourners.

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Well I suppose this letter will make you mad as all hell. But I can't help that, old thing. If I thought that I was going to be able to make a choice of these things within a reasonable time, I should string you along. But the truth is that I don't want to spend more than a very limited amount on books. I must be frank, and not let you run away with the idea that I am J.P. Morgan. This may make me much less interesting than I should be if you could suppose that I bought most recklessly. But, be that as it may, I have a good deal of ground to cover in a good many directions during the course of a year. Besides, as I told Rodker at the beginning of this year, I am going to try to collect a few prints this year. Now, that doesn't mean that I am starting a print cabinet. It means that I might get ten or twelve good prints during the course of the year. I am not the owner of a South American copper mine, nor am I a bootlegger.

Who the deuce can Philip Marno be? I am sure I never heard of him. You don't suppose that I would sick anybody on you like that, do you? Certainly not. You are, as a matter of fact, one of the treasures of the humble. I being the humble. I don't believe I have seen a soul to whom I have talked about you for a year. I live like a turtle under a bush, and when I get away from town, believe me, I don't stay sober any longer than I must. The amount of talking that I have done about things of this sort during the last year would probably boil down to a few syllables. I pride myself on being a member of the Long Key Fishing Club of Atlanta and of the Brown Derby Club of East Hartford, and I take damned little stock in conversation on philosophy, aesthetics, poetry, art, or blondes. Of course, I hanker for all those things as a fly hankers for fly paper. But experience has taught me that fly paper is one devil of a thing to get mixed up in. You should see some of the letters that I get!

Do, Reyher, please forgive me for not behaving properly about the books. But it is simply out of the question, under the circumstances. Still, I wish I could tell you how much I enjoyed getting your letter. It was like going to the Evangelical Church in Reading, and hearing old Dr. Kuendig preach in German on the text "Ich bin der Weg, die Wahrheit, und das Leben." Klenken's Presse Evangelium Sancti Johannis is the sweetest line of poetry I have heard for a long time. Gosh! how I should like to have the book! But I must forswear it.

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Aren't you homesick for the Frühlingswetter? You should hear the titwillow, et al. We are still in the very early stages, though we have had crocuses for several weeks, and I have seen a few daffodils and hyacinths. The robins are back in the trees in the evenings, and one begins to find one's aquarium a bore.

Sincerely,
Wallace Stevens

Shall try to trace The American Language.

[February 15, 1923]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher
Morsemere, N. J.

Dear Ferd:

I suppose I shall have to get down to Ferd[8] sooner or later, so I might as well do it now.

I have your letter of January 21. I have just returned to the office after a month's absence in the south, else I should have answered it before. Unfortunately, I am not a member of the Harvard Club, and very rarely go there, so that I cannot do you any good. Pitts Sanborn is a member, but I believe he makes very little use of it.

I shall try to get in touch with you the next time I am in New York and tell you all about my trip.

Yours truly,
Wallace Stevens

[March 23, 1923]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher
Morsemere, N. J.

Dear Ferd:

Nothing doing on the $250. The income tax has nothing to do with it. But I have been helping out one of my brothers

[8] This refers to the postcard my father received in 1922, signed "Ferd. Reyher."

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recently, and what with that and a trip to Havana, etc., and then some, I am not much disposed to let money go out of the family circle. However, here is $50.00, which will enable you to make the trip to Cambridge. You can repay this at your convenience, or else you can send me $50.00 worth of the books that you mention, full weight, because I rather think that there is still a little coming to me.

I wish very much that I could oblige you. But this is a niggardly world all around. I wish this all the more because you seem to be in a hell of a hole. Take the $50.00 as showing my desire to do the best I can. I return your check.

Always sincerely yours,
Wallace Stevens

(over)

By the way, if you decide to send books, do not send me any of Beerbohm's, George Moore's, or anything like that. I want things only from private presses abroad. If you haven't what you think I should like, or if you do not want to part with what you have, simply keep the money. I don't want to do you out of your books because you are hard up.

[April 10, 1923]

Mr. Ferdinand Reyher,

Dear Ferd:

I suppose it is Morsemere that prevents me from writing to you more diligently. Every time I see Morsemere I think of Remorsemere. Where the devil is that Goethe?

But what I really want is this. I want to see Rodker when he arrives. No doubt he will look you up, and you can then let me know just where he is, and we can have a rendez-vous. I should like to do something for him, particularly if he brings over the five missing volumes of Casanova. If he doesn't, I may merely take a walk with him.

I was in Philadelphia the greater part of last week.

Yours sincerely,
Wallace Stevens

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April 21.[9]

Dear Sage of Morsemere:

I have it. Very nice. Thanks. The *einmaligkeitness* of it is not its chief charm. The Germans manage to get a solidity and reality into productions of this kind that distinguish them. Carried to its extreme in an [opus?] the result would be, not the French or Italian bibelot, but something magnificent. And I intend to read it too: I have not read G. since I took K. Franke's course in him at college. . . . Remember me when the English pilgrim arrives.

Best regards,
Wallace Stevens

Room 1422
Wednesday.[10]

Dear Reyher:

I shall probably be around this hotel until about 9 or 9:30. Later I can be reached at the office (HA&I CO. 9212 [may be 1212] Beekman). I shall have some time early in the afternoon, as I have only one appointment in N.Y. this trip. If you happen to be coming in to New-York try to get in touch with me. I could (and should) meet you almost anywhere about 2 P.M.

Yrs,
Wallace Stevens

690 Asylum Avenue,
Hartford, Conn.
May 16, 1923.

Dear Friar [Reyher]:

Will you tell Rodker that the Casanova has not turned up (the disguised volume) and that I should be glad to have him send volume 8 to Mr. McCallum in Toronto: If Mr. McCallum

[9] No year given in date. Probably 1923.
[10] This letter, written on Hotel Commodore (New York) stationery, is undated.

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receives volume 8 and if in the meantime I fail to receive volume 12, I shall then ask Rodker to send all the missing volumes to Mr. McCallum, whose address is

Peter A. McCallum,
24 Wellington Street East,
Toronto, Ontario,
Canada.

I regretted not seeing you on Sunday morning. If on your way to Cape Cod you and Rodker cared to break the trip by stopping over in Hartford I should be sincerely glad to have you do so. I fear that with Rodker so deeply engaged in his Arabian Nights he is likely to be diffident about Pitts Sanborn's book. But I know that the sort of thing he would do is precisely what P. S. is looking for and notwithstanding the printers here could not procure for love or money in America.

Good luck to both of you.
Yrs,
W. Stevens

Tuesday Morning[11]

Dear F:

I received the Gospel at home last night. Certainly it is a beautiful piece of work in the purest German style, as sound and circumspect. I am delighted to have it. While not exactly a Pennsylvania Dutchman, Martin Luther is a native element of the Pennsylvania Dutchman's [soul?]. The book takes me back, therefore, to a time when Reading was not a suburb of Philadelphia, and when, at this very time of the year, I used to go to the Christmas parties of the Harmonic Männerchor and on Sundays to St. John's Church, occasionally, to hear Dr. Kündig preach in German, no doubt from the text of this very book. Consequently the book is most pat to the recherche du temps perdu which rages in us now. Hartford is a frightfully uncongenial place, always has been and always will be, although

[11] Undated.

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in winter it reaches an [2 illeg. words] degree of staleness. However, this special complaint gets me nowhere, not even with one's self, although, here, one's self is one's [work?]. I meant merely to let you know how glad I am to have the book, by way of postscript to the note I sent you yesterday before I had had time to look at it. I hope to see you soon.

Always yours,
Wallace Stevens

Afterword

Two postcards I found in 1963, when I began working on my father's correspondence, led me on an intriguing, but frustrating, search for the sender. Both were addressed to Wallace Stevens: the first at 441 W. 21st St., New York City, was postmarked Berlin, Germany, in 1915; the second, sent to him at the Hartford Accident & Indemnity Co., in Hartford, Connecticut, from Germany, in 1922, gave a return address of Büdingen (Oberhessen). Both were signed "Reyher" (the second included a first name, "Ferd.").[12] The brief messages indicated that the two men were good friends and had mutual acquaintances in the literary world.

I found a reference to a "Ferdinand Rhyer" in *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams.*[13] He had attended a party at the Williamses' home in Rutherford, New Jersey, in the spring of 1916. I found another reference in my father's letter to Harriet Monroe of December 2, 1920:[14]

> My friend Ferdinand Reyher is spending the winter in London, and I expect shortly to receive odds and ends from him, so that when you come to Hartford again we may be able to make you more content than you imagine.[15]

[12] The postcards are now part of the Wallace Stevens Archive at The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

[13] New York, New Directions, 1948.

[14] Harriet Monroe Modern Poetry Library, University of Chicago.

[15] *Letters of Wallace Stevens* (New York, A. A. Knopf, 1966), Letter No. 240.

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I then turned to the card catalogue at the Yale University Library, where I learned that Reyher had been born in 1891 (making him twelve years younger than my father), and that he had published two books that the Yale Library owned: *Man, the Tiger, and the Snake*, published in 1921 by Putnam; and *David Farragut, Sailor*, published by Lippincott in 1953.

My next step in the search was to query the publishers. G. P. Putnam's Sons replied to my letter of July 30, 1964: "We did publish the book according to records but have not a single copy left and no record of Mr. Reyher's whereabouts or of any correspondence of his." J. B. Lippincott responded to my letter of January 20, 1965, that if I wished to send a letter to Reyher c/o Lippincott, they would be glad to forward it promptly. I wrote immediately, and my letter was returned from Lippincott with a cover note, dated February 2, 1965, saying that my letter had been returned by the post office and that the firm had no other address. The forwarding address had been "645 Bush Street, Apt. 203, San Francisco 8, Calif." The post office stamp read, "MOVED NO ADDRESS."

At that time I was also corresponding with a younger colleague and friend of my father, Wilson Taylor, who worked in the San Francisco office of the Hartford Accident & Indemnity Co. He kindly checked the Bush Street address for me and responded that, indeed, at one time a man named Reyher had lived there (he got his information from the 1961 City Directory), but that about two years earlier, the building had been demolished to make room for a parking garage. Taylor also mentioned in his letter of February 16, 1965, that he had checked with the telephone company (no trace). He also checked the Public Library and discovered that one of Reyher's books, *I Heard Them Sing*, had been published by Little, Brown and Co. in 1946.

On February 23, 1965, I queried Little, Brown. The response, dated March 5, 1965, said that they would be glad to forward my letter to Reyher to an address they had for him in New York. I wrote, and my letter (in its original envelope) was forwarded to "Hotel Chelsea, 222 W. 23rd St., NY NY." It was returned to me by the post office, stamped "NOT AT HOTEL CHELSEA—ADDRESS UNKNOWN." Another dead end. I gave up, finished the manuscript of my edition of *Letters of*

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Wallace Stevens in September 1965, and the book was published the following year.

Five years later I received a telephone call from Donald B. Gallup, Curator of the Collection of American Literature at the Yale University Library. He had received a letter, dated April 15, 1971, from Faith Reyher (Mrs. Melvin) Jackson, who had "more than a dozen" letters from Wallace Stevens to her father, Ferdinand Reyher. She was looking for the opposite side of the correspondence! I wrote to her on April 22 and had a warm response dated May 5. When I next wrote to her, on May 22, I enclosed photocopies of the Reyher material I had: the two postcards mentioned earlier, and a letter from her father to mine dated Dec. 2, 1921, from Berlin.[16]

In June 1971 Faith's son, Jeremy Jackson, brought me photocopies of the material she had. From Faith's letters to me I learned some things about Reyher: He and my father shared a Pennsylvania German background (Reyher had grown up in the Germantown area of Philadelphia); Faith and I were both "only children"; among other writers, Reyher had had a working relationship with Bertolt Brecht which was being studied by a professor at Harvard named Lyon; Reyher had died from a series of strokes and other illnesses. Faith and I finally met, in New Haven, where we had lunch together on November 12, 1971. It was a pleasant occasion, but we were not in touch again until 1980.

During July 1977 I received a letter from James K. Lyon, Professor of German Literature at the University of California, San Diego. He asked permission to quote from a letter my father had written to Reyher on June 3, 1916, in a monograph on the friendship between Bertolt Brecht and Ferdinand Reyher. This was not one of the letters of which Faith had given me photocopies; Lyon went on to say that he had seen the letter in 1971, when it was owned by Ernst Halberstadt, a cousin of Faith Reyher Jackson. I asked Lyon to supply me with a photocopy of the letter and, when I received it, gave Lyon permission to quote the passage—but I wanted a copy of his monograph, even if I had to pay for it. After two queries, in 1978 and 1980, Lyon sent me a copy of his *Bertolt Brecht's*

[16] I do not remember when, or where, I found that letter.

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American Cicerone,[17] which had just been published. It arrived on February 2, 1980.

From the monograph I learned more details about Ferdinand Maximilian Reyher. He was born in Philadelphia on July 26, 1891, the son of Max and Lina Sichel Reyher. His mother was a Catholic convert from Judaism. He married Rebecca Hourwich in 1917 (and Faith was born in 1919). They were divorced in 1934, and Reyher remarried in 1956. He died in 1967.

I thought the search was complete, but on April 3, 1980, Sue Hodson, Assistant Curator of Literary Manuscripts at the Huntington Library, sent me photocopies of material received the previous day: copies of two letters from my father to Reyher dated June 3, 1916,[18] and Nov. 15, 1917. When I wrote to thank Ms. Hodson, I sent a copy of my letter, and copies of the copies, to Faith. In June 1980 Faith responded and, in July, sent photocopies of seven "new" letters from my father to hers and one from Reyher to Stevens. She also mentioned that the first letters she had sent me, via Jeremy, were at the University of Maryland. I queried her on September 5, 1980, about the new material: no response.

Only two letters from Reyher to Stevens have come to my attention: one dated Dec. 2, 1921; the other, dated February 27, 1939, from Hollywood, California, indicating that the two had not been in touch for a long time. They are omitted here, as are the postcards.

HOLLY STEVENS

[17] James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht's American Cicerone*, with an appendix containing the complete correspondence between Bertolt Brecht and Ferdinand Reyher, Bonn, Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1978. The frontispiece is a photograph of Brecht and Reyher, New Jersey, 1946.

[18] As noted, I had already received a copy from Lyon.

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JORGE LUIS BORGES

Ten Poems

Translated by Robert Mezey

Poem of the Gifts

Let no one see self-pity or rebuke
In this avowal of the mastery
Of God, Who has, with consummate irony,
Given me books and darkness at one stroke.

Over this city of books He has, it seems,
Given dominion to sightless eyes, that can
Read only in the libraries of dreams
The senseless paragraphs that every dawn

Yields to their yearning. All in vain the day
Lavishes on them its infinities
Of books as rigorous as the codices
That went up in smoke at Alexandria.

From thirst and hunger (we learn from a Greek story)
A king dies amid garden plots and fountains;
I weaken aimlessly in the blind confines
Of this profound and lofty library.

The high stacks proffer in their vast detail
Encyclopedias, atlases, dynasties
Of East and West, symbols, cosmogonies,
Eras and eons,—but to no avail.

Haltingly, slowly in the vacant gloom,
I explore these shadows with a cane for eyes,

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I, who always imagined Paradise
Under the aspect of a reading-room.

Something that certainly cannot be conveyed
By the word *hazard* governs all these things;
Another man in other murky evenings
Received the myriad volumes, and the shade.

Pacing along the unhurried corridors
I often feel with a kind of sacred dread
That I am that other person who, now dead,
Paced the same paces in the selfsame hours.

Which of us two is writing out this verse
Of a single shadow and a plural I?
What matter my surname if it signify
A singular and indivisible curse?

Groussac or Borges, I contemplate this cherished
World as it blazes up and changes shape
And flickers out into a vague white ash
That looks much like oblivion, or sleep.

My Books

My books (which do not know that I exist)
Are as much a part of me as this visage
With its grey hair at the temples and grey eyes
That I look for vainly in glass surfaces
And wonderingly run my curved hand over.
And not without some logical bitterness
It occurs to me that the essential words
That most express me are not in my own writings
But in those books that don't know who I am.
Better that way. The voices of the dead
Will utter me forever.

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Simón Carbajal

Antelo's fields, 1890 or so,
My father had charge of him. Perhaps they exchanged
A few sparing and long forgotten words.
He remembered nothing of the man but this:
The back of his dark-skinned left hand crisscrossed
With scratches,—claw marks. Back then, on the ranch,
Everyone worked out his own destiny:
This one broke horses, that one was a wrangler,
Another man could rope like nobody else—
Simón Carbajal was the jaguar man.
Whenever a jaguar preyed upon the sheepfold
Or someone heard her growling in the darkness,
Carbajal would track her into the mountains.
He took a knife with him, and a few dogs.
And when at last he closed with her in a thicket
He would set the dogs on her. The tawny beast
As like as not sprang suddenly on the man
Shaking a poncho draped over his left arm,
Both shield and a muleta. The white belly
Was unprotected and the animal
Felt the knife as it entered her and felt
The steel burning inside her as she died.
The duel was fatal, and it was infinite.
He went on killing always the same jaguar
Which was immortal. Don't let this surprise you
Too much. His destiny is yours, and mine,
Except for the fact that our jaguar takes forms
That change continuously. Call it Hatred,
Or Love, or Hazard, call it Every Moment.

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The Temptation

Here goes General Quiroga to his funeral,
Invited by the venal Santos Pérez,
And above Santos Pérez there is Rosas,
The deeply hidden spider of Palermo.
As a devout coward, Rosas knows
That of all men there isn't anyone
More vulnerable and fragile than the brave man.
Juan Facundo Quiroga is audacious
To the point of lunacy. This fact may be
Worth the consideration of one who hates him.
Who has resolved to kill him. Vacillates,
But at last finds the weapon he was seeking:
What else but the dark hunger and thirst for danger?
Quiroga leaves for the north. This same Rosas
Tips him off, almost at the foot of the carriage,
That rumor has it that that bastard López
Premeditates his murder. He suggests
That he not undertake so bold a journey
Without escort. He himself offers one.
Facundo has been smiling. He does not
Need help. He can rely on himself. The creaking
Carriage leaves the settlements behind.
Miles of heavy rain mire it down,
Mud and swirling mist and the rising water.
At last they make out Córdoba. The Córdobans,
Having already given them up for dead,
Look at them as if they were their ghosts.
Last night all Córdoba watched as Santos Pérez
Handed out the swords. The hunting party
Consists of thirty riders from the sierra.
Never before, Sarmiento will write,
Has a crime been set afoot so brazenly.
Juan Facundo Quiroga seems untroubled.
He moves on. In Santiago del Estero
He gives himself to the sweet risk of cards;
Between sundown and dawn he wins or loses

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Hundreds and hundreds of gold doubloons. By dawn
Danger signals have multiplied. Abruptly
He decides to turn back and gives the order.
Over those mountains, through that open country
They retrace their steps along the dangerous roads.
In a nondescript place called Ojo de Agua
The posthouse keeper tells him that the party
Dispatched to murder him has passed that way
And lies in wait for them in a place he names.
No one is to be spared. Those are the orders.
Or so he has been told by Santos Pérez,
Their captain. But Facundo doesn't frighten—
The man who has the nerve to kill Quiroga
Hasn't been born yet, is his cool rejoinder.
The other men are ashen and say nothing.
Night falls, and only one of them is sleeping,
The fated one, the strong one, who has faith
In his dark gods. Gradually it grows light.
They will not live to see another morning.
What is the point, one wonders, in concluding
A story told once and for all? The carriage
Sets off down the road to Barranca Yaco.

One of Lee's Soldiers
(1862)

A bullet has accosted him on the verge
Of a clear stream whose name he never knew.
He falls face downward. (This story is true
And in this one man many soldiers merge.)
A golden breeze stirs the drooping needles
Of a stand of pines. At an unflagging pace
An ant moves up the imperturbable face.
The sun climbs. Many things have changed already
And will go on changing ceaselessly until
A day far in the future when I sing

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Of you who fell unwept by anything,
Fell, already a dead man, and lay still.
There is not even a stone to tell your story;
Six feet of earth are all your nameless glory.

The White Hind

From what back-country ballad of England's verdant land,
From what Persian miniature, from what mysterious realm
Of all the nights and mornings that our yesterday hides in its hand
Comes the snow-white hind that appeared to me this morning in my dream?
It would have been only an instant. I saw her cross the meadow
And disappear into the gold of a spectral close of day,
Airy creature made out of a little gleam of memory
And a little of forgetfulness, white hind that casts no shadow.
The deities and spirits by whom this curious world is ruled
Permitted me to dream you but not to have you for my own;
Perhaps in some meander that the endless future may hold
I shall find you again, oh white hind that for one instant shone.
I myself am a fleeting dream that lasts but a day or two,
But little more than the dream of a moment of whiteness and of dew.

Elegy for the Impossible Memory

What wouldn't I give for the memory
Of a dirt street with low adobe walls
And a tall horseman looming against the dawn

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(His poncho long and frayed)
On one of those days on the plains
That has no date.
What wouldn't I give for the memory
Of my mother looking out at the morning
On the ranch at Santa Irene,
Not knowing that her name would be Borges.
What wouldn't I give for the memory
Of having fought at Cepeda
And seen Estanislao del Campo
Riding out to meet the first bullet
With brave and reckless joy.
What wouldn't I give for the memory
Of a great wooden door to a hidden villa
That my father pushed open each night
Before getting lost in sleep
And pushed open for the last time
On the 14th of February, 1938.
What wouldn't I give for the memory
Of Hengist's long ships
Weighing anchor off the sands of Denmark
To conquer an island
Not yet called England.
What wouldn't I give for the memory
(I had it once and have lost it)
Of a golden canvas of Turner's,
Immense as music.
What wouldn't I give for the memory
Of having heard Socrates
As, on the evening of hemlock,
He serenely examined the problem
Of immortality,
Balancing myth and logic
While blue death crept upward
From his feet, already numb.
What wouldn't I give for the memory
Of your having said that you loved me
And of not having slept until dawn,
Heartbroken and happy.

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Relics

The Southern Hemisphere. Under its algebra
of constellations unknown to Ulysses,
a man is seeking and will go on seeking
the faint relics of that epiphany
vouchsafed to him, so many years ago,
on the other side of a numbered door
in a hotel, beside the timeless Thames,
that flows along as that other river flows,
the ethereal element of time. The flesh
forgets its sorrows and its happinesses.
The man waits and dreams. Slowly, vaguely,
he rescues a few trivial circumstances.
A woman's name, a whiteness, a body
by now without a face; the hazy half-light
of an evening of no date; the drizzling rain;
a few wax flowers on a marble slab;
and the low walls, the color a pale rose.

Elegy

Now it is yours, Abramowicz, the singular taste of death, withheld from no one, which will be offered to me in this house or across the ocean, on the banks of your Rhône, flowing fatally as if it were Time itself, that other and more ancient Rhône. Yours too the certainty that Time leaves its yesterdays behind and that nothing is irreparable or the opposing certainty that the days can erase nothing and that there is no act, no dream, that does not cast an infinite shadow. Geneva considered you a jurist, a man of lawsuits and verdicts, but in every word, in every silence, you were a poet. Perhaps this very moment you are leafing through the various books which you did not write but imagined and gave up on, and which for us justify you and in a way exist. During the first war, while men were killing one

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another, we two dreamed two dreams that were named Laforgue and Baudelaire. We discovered things that all young men discover: ignorant love, irony, a longing to be Raskolnikov or Prince Hamlet, words and sunsets. Generations of Israel were in you when you said to me one time, smiling, *Je suis très fatigué. J'ai quatre mille ans.* This took place on the Earth; useless to guess how old you must be in Heaven.

I don't know if you are still someone, I don't know if you can hear me.

Buenos Aires, 14 January 1984

To One No Longer Young

Now you can see the tragic mise en scène
With everything in its accustomed place—
Ashes and sword for Dido the sad queen,
The coin for poor blind Belisarius.

Why do you keep on looking for the war
In the old bronze hexameters darkly lit
When here they are, the seven feet of dirt,
The sudden hemorrhage, the open pit?

Here the plummetless mirror that will dream
And then forget the face of your extreme
And final days, is keeping you in sight.

Now the end draws near. It is the house
Where the slow hours of your brief evening pass,
The street that fills your eyes, day in, day out.

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SARAH PRIESTMAN

Starlight

In April of 1973 I straightened the straps on my denim overalls, laced my black high-tops, and hitchhiked 1,000 miles from Providence, Rhode Island, to Deerfield, Illinois, home of Trinity College, breeding ground of the Evangelical Church of Christ.

It was just one of about thirty road trips I made within a five-year span, during which time I waved my thumb at the sky and smiled at approaching windshields in forty-eight states (including Alaska) and nine Canadian provinces, covering approximately 34,000 miles. I usually waited alone. That way, if I wanted to, I could drop my arm and walk along the access road like a child, watching the white toes of my sneakers against the black tarmac.

Miles were traded for time. If I had a stretch of days for my journey and was tempted to forgo a state-wide ride for a few vacant hours of sitting at a picnic table in a rest stop, I could. I often did. I'd fish snacks and books from a fastidiously organized backpack, fiddle with my compact camping stove, generate a cup of exquisitely strong coffee, and read or write or dawdle. I'd sit in the distance like a moviegoer hidden in the back rows of a theater, and I'd watch the steady stream of cars pull into the rest stop. Heavy doors swung open, feet slapped on the pavement, individuals burst forth. Some struggled out of seat belts and into jackets while climbing out. Kids chomped at the clean air and the grassy space. Mothers rallied round the rest rooms. Everyone gathered in front of the YOU ARE HERE map. Drivers shook their heads, grieving over the space still looming in front of them. Fathers offered geographical trivia to their children. Boys and girls pointed at the map, hollering the recognized names of towns. Parents reined in their crews, doors thudded, vehicles rolled. When my belly was full and my face warm from the sun, I slipped my supplies into plastic bags,

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positioned them tenderly inside the pack, tugged the pack's ties taut, leaned it against the EXIT sign, and put my thumb to work.

If, however, a cross-country round trip was squeezed into ten days, I'd hop out when the driver exited the highway and immediately jab at the air to snare another ride. Sleeping wasn't scheduled, eating was too time consuming, languishing over books or scenery not an option.

The vitality lay in the simple act of going someplace. I raised my thumb like a banner of free will, weaving trips between semesters, jobs, relationships, holidays. I'd visit a friend in Seattle during spring break, or I'd line up substitutes for my waitress shifts and speed to the Rocky Mountains over a four-day weekend. Between New Year's and the brink of second semester, I'd hit the beach in Malibu for an inconsequential afternoon of heat and surf and begin hurtling back that same evening. Alone on Route 80 on an icy bright Midwestern morning, one arm open to the oncoming Eastbound traffic, I'd whir with the exhilaration of distance captured by unbeatable timing.

One autumn, the road replaced the classroom. I crossed Canada in September, watched trick-or-treaters in Arizona, and was home before Thanksgiving. Hitchhiking along Route 1 in Manitoba meant dallying under a broad rambling sky. The hours retreated into colors: pale blue, lucid blue, gray, ebony. The crack of light on the horizon remained white, like the quill of a jay feather, until sundown. Lumpy towers of bound straw stood poised in vast blond fields. Mornings were cool and bracing. Sometimes I'd see my spit freeze in the sinks of the tiny gas station bathrooms where I brushed my teeth. Rides were quick if my thumb jutted out. Walks were filled with the silence of the open plains if I didn't.

I ruminated about my friends back home, imagining them waiting for a class to end, a job to get to, a boyfriend to make the phone jangle. I imagined them waiting for opportunities, anticipating changes, hoping for recognition, expecting something to be over or something to begin. I watched for automobiles and trucks, satisfied that the immediacy of my isolation was more invigorating than the dull suspension of their lives.

The spring break when I flashed my thumb in the direction

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of Trinity College carved one of the first notches on my backpack's belt. My best friend from high school, Carol Gustav, was a freshman there. To this day, a photograph of us hangs on the wall of my mother's sewing room. In it, we are standing side by side next to our school locker, which is open. The inside of the door is plastered with newsprint photographs of local boys who were team captains or varsity players, a magazine cut-out of an athlete suspended in the midst of a pole vault, and snapshots of shaggy-headed guys we liked. A stack of books overflows from the floor of the locker into the hall. Eric Segal's *Love Story* tops the pile.

We are laughing in the picture because we are in love with each other because we are both in love with boys. We look like teen-age icons. She is dressed in a short, flower-dotted yellow shift which reveals her pale legs, gangly as popsicle sticks. A white Band-Aid is centered on one kneecap. She wears pastel knee socks and loafers, glasses and short hair. My hair tumbles softly to my waist. I wear a boy's oxford blue shirt tucked into snug white jeans. Because it is not cut for a woman's body, the shirt strains against my breasts. Against my trim hips and thighs, the jeans look painted on. I was the friend whose escapades Gustav (I never called her Carol) riled her mother with; she was the friend I could dazzle with my exploits.

I didn't tell Gustav I was coming to Trinity that spring. I arrived after impeccable connections which had taken me from Providence to Buffalo to Toledo to Chicago and now to Deerfield. I was sprawled in the open bed of a pickup truck I'd hailed east of Chicago in that day's first hazy hours, basking in my luck, warming in the spring sun, gazing at the ganglia of budding branches hanging over the suburban roads through which we meandered. The driver detoured to pass by Trinity's campus, where I climbed out and we shook hands before he continued on.

I spotted her in the library and whispered hello. We embraced with the thrill of old sweethearts. I said I hoped to hang out a few days; she replied, like a true friend, that I could sleep on her floor. Before we pushed my pack under her bunk, I burrowed past my folded T-shirts and pulled out the gem I'd brought to show her: the recently published bible of introductory feminism, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Put together by the Boston

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Women's Health Collective, it outlined the medical, political, personal and social changes needed to discover true liberation. The book traveled in a culture which rumbled just below the mainstream, where Helen Reddy's demand, "I am Woman, hear me roar," had already blasted into the top forty.

We knelt on the cold linoleum and flipped through the pages. The book was about the size of our hometown phone directory. I jabbed excitedly to Gustav about the women I knew at school. They lived together in communal houses, cooked vegetarian soup in huge pots and invited other women over to talk about men. I'd spent tedious afternoons in their kitchens, kneading massive piles of whole-wheat dough in pursuit of kinship. While I'd waited for the dough to rise, I listened to the women debate about things I'd assumed were mine until they disclosed to me that they were not: freedom, choice, independence. I found myself both startled and enchanted by the way men were discussed at these klatches—not as objects of pursuit, but as oppressors. I told Gustav that after we'd stuffed ourselves with the fresh warm slices of bread slathered with butter and honey, I'd wander back to my dormitory, my arms hugging myself against the blustery night, mulling over the conversations I'd heard. I'd come to Trinity, I explained, to find out what she thought.

"And look at this," I insisted, tapping the book, "look at the power men have over our own bodies. We have to take our power back, we can't skirt the issue, we can't wait for it to be handed over." That was what they said in the cooking coven. Were these women worth listening to? Their kitchen had been cozy, but I had fidgeted, always ready to slip outside into the nipping air. Did she understand?

Gustav was puzzled. She confessed that she enjoyed her Bible study, her cheerleading and her all-girl dorm. She winced at the gynecological drawings in my book. She said she'd never heard of what I was talking about, and, no, she didn't understand.

I slapped *Our Bodies, Ourselves* shut. She told me to hide the book from her roommate. We sat immobilized, as if the wire that carried the juice in our friendship had been severed, and then Gustav remembered a story about someone we both knew. Her gossip re-charged us. I felt the blessing of familiar banter,

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and realized that I rarely laughed like this at the bustling female suppers.

The next day, mysterious small signs appeared scotch-taped along the cinder block walls in the dorm corridor announcing a "Candle lighting" to be held that evening. Around 8:00, one hundred women descended upon the sunken circular lobby and assembled on steps along the rim, like an audience in a Roman amphitheater. Most wore bathrobes and spotless slippers, some wore matching pajama sets, several posed teddy bears on their laps like briefcases. Many of them had prepared for sleep before the event by taping a curl of hair to their jawbone or rolling their slack yellow tresses around an orange-juice can and fastening the can to the top of their skulls with bobby pins. Others had smeared blemish cream on their chins and noses. Gustav and I perched on the steps among the quilted robes. The dorm mother sat at the piano and began to play "Close to You."

The music signaled the arrival of a tall white candle. The crowd hushed. The piano softly tinkled. A woman stood gripping the candle before her the way a child might steady the pole of a pogo stick she is about to hop onto. She took a ring from her pocket and slipped it over the candle until it firmly encircled the shaft. She struck a match and held it to the wick. The women stared. The wick shot into flame. We sat silently as she whispered a prayer over the candle. The piano played the same song. A short poem was read. She passed the candle to the woman next to her, who gazed at the ring in the glow of the flame and then handed the candle to the woman next to her. The candle was passed from one delicate palm to the next, flickering and dripping but never going out. Women smiled and murmured and nodded at the ring. When it was handed to me, I nodded too. The ring's diamond reflected the fire in such a way that the faceted stone appeared to be a cluster of tiny twinkling stars. After the candle had made it around the circle once, the murmurs stopped. The piano was silent. The candle was passed deftly. If it lingered in anyone's fist, the beginnings of great gasps were heard. About five bathrobes away from me it paused for a moment and then the woman holding it blew out the flame. Her carefully aimed breath was audible in the stillness.

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The women erupted into a cheer and thundered across the lobby to the one who had wriggled the ring off of the candle and was now raising it toward Heaven. They hugged her and mouthed her name at the ceiling. She was crying, and others were weeping with her. The dorm mothers smiled and poked at the tears in the corners of their eyes.

I suddenly realized that I was witnessing a celebration of the woman's engagement. I grabbed Gustav's elbow and hustled her to the hallway. Didn't she see how demeaning this was? No, she didn't. Did they ever do this if someone did well in school, or won an award or something?

"No," she said, "of course not."

"But don't you see—this is like saying that all women live for men," I hissed. The idea seemed plausible to her. "It's a ritual that marks the end of waiting," I continued, "as if there could ever be an end."

"But for me," she asserted, "finding a husband is the end. This is good."

We stood apart. Orange-juice cans bobbed on the heads of the women.

Gustav and I returned to her room, where we tussled like puppies with a ragged sneaker between them. "Engagement is something to celebrate," she insisted.

"Yes, of course. But it isn't the only thing. It isn't the main thing," I answered.

"It can be."

"It might be."

"You wait."

In the years that followed I fed an obsession with being alone by being on the road with strangers. No bread-baking and consciousness-raising sessions. No corralling my ideas. No curtailing my energy. No stances, only movement. If I slept alone under a highway overpass, I'd wake up in the jittery chilly dark and search out a diner as the dawn light quivered along the horizon. The moist breeze bristled against my face. I tightened the frayed belt of my backpack and marched on. Life was the gnawing in my stomach, the cars in the distance, my own thoughts. No other voice in conversation. No other ideas to be reckoned with.

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If I didn't want to wait or wander, I'd hustle rides at a truckstop. These were the years when truckdrivers were being glamorized as blacktop renegades. "Convoy," a country-western hit by C. W. McCall, was condemned by Iowa Governor Robert Ray and banned from the Des Moines C&W station, WHO, because it celebrated a thousand-truck convoy roaring through roadblocks and tollbooths. 350,000 long-haul truckers drove the Interstate twenty-four hours a day. Highway rebels or not, they all ate at truckstops.

On the television show, "Movin' On," Claude Akins portrayed a diesel cowboy who figured fun-loving freeway high jinks into his job and burned the rubber on his eighteen wheels when he needed to high-tail it away from Smokey. The truckers I met figured mileage and tonnage and rubbed their erasers against the load requirement forms from the Interstate Commerce Commission. Not quite free birds, they lined up like lemmings at the "chicken coop"—a weighing station.

Inside the truckstops I strolled from booth to booth, the Miss Manners of Mileage, inquiring politely about a lift. I intentionally appeared boyish: cropped hair, big jackets, worn Levis, boots. Unlike the "pavement princesses"—hookers whose red-light district was the truckstop's back lot—I was respectful, articulate, straightforward. I once left a woman companion to her own devices when her saucy strategies violated my own hitchhiking ethic: No fooling around. Just looking for a little dialogue and a long ride. And more was never demanded of me.

Holding on to an agreeable driver meant sliding into the booth while he finished his meal, his paperwork, his coffee. We'd chat. I'd play my game of "Starlight":

Although we know that the pinpricks of light smattered against the night had beginnings lifetimes away, we forget it. We assume that the light we see is being emanated at that exact nano-second. Because we don't witness the thread of time winding backwards to the initial spark, we're not interested in the first kindling as we behold the final flicker. With starlight, the present is enough.

In my secret game, I introduced an instantly invented name, a hometown I'd never been to, an occupation I'd only read about. During each ride, the words which ignited the conver-

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sation were kindled moment by moment. My history was like the trail hovering behind the flickering point of a star: invisible, and eons away.

Chatting, we'd stride together down the aisles between Peterbilts and Macks and Freightliners. After I'd lifted my backpack over my head and shoved it onto the passenger seat, and the driver had picked it up and pushed it onto the berth, I'd clutch the silver handle on the side of the cab, hoist myself through the door, and nestle onto the seat, my toes just nudging the floor. The driver closed the doors with an electric device. They wooshed. I was good for a day or two, if I decided to stay for the whole ride. I could doze on the gritty sheets wrinkled across the berth while he barreled through the night.

He talked about his family, the government, television. I was safe company. He inhaled deeply on his Marlboros. He was less scholarly than the pony-tailed men I scooped rice alongside of at the college-town food co-op, but also less self-occupied. He wasn't the redneck bonehead bruiser I'd been warned about. He was crude and he liked to think he was kind. He was kind to me. I relaxed in the passenger seat, staring for miles along the side of the road where the stony gray pavement lapped over the tough grass. If I wanted to veer off towards a different destination, I could squeeze the CB microphone and call to the drivers within range. "Breaker 1-9, breaker 1-9. Hitchhiker here. Going my way?"

He'd exit regularly to check with his dispatcher about the "flip side"—a return load—waiting at his drop-off point. If I found a better ride on the CB, the two drivers would rendezvous at the next truckstop and I'd belay up the side of another cab. Rolling off the lot, I'd thank the first driver over the radio from the new truck. "Ten four," he'd answer,"good buddy."

I've stopped waiting along the entrance ramps of North America. The smell of diesel no longer lingers on my jeans. The vitality of going someplace has settled into the novelty of staying right where I am.

Gustav now balances a career and mothering. She and I have both wedged our feet onto our own ladders of success. We agree that the glow at the top of these ladders shines through a corporate glass ceiling.

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Our paces define us. While I'm doing my quiet wake-up yoga, she's slam-dunking soiled Pampers into the bin and bouncing a crying infant against her pajamas. As I nestle my coffee filter into my one-cup cone and listen to the news, she is spooning mashed bananas into a gurgling mouth. She and her husband listen to one another's schedule for the day. I fit my schedule around no one. They fit their baby in the car seat and leave for their jobs.

If I find myself near Gustav's office, I'll surprise her with a quick visit. We'll sneak into the office kitchenette. I confide that I'm sleepy from a late night in front of someone else's VCR and pile two spoonfuls of instant coffee into a CATHY cup. She says she's tired, too, and dips a peppermint tea bag into her MOM mug. She is still breast-feeding and her baby reacts to the caffeine.

We slouch against the tiny counter. She asks me what I watched on the VCR. The movies I name are recent releases. She says that all she sees is what's written on the BabyWipes container.

We both chuckle. Gustav holds her warm mug against her cheek and sighs. She asks me if I have plans for the evening, which I often do. I go to classes: Advanced Jitterbug on Monday, and on Thursday, International Cooking. Sometimes I bring home stir-fry from Lotus Heaven, answer a few phone messages, and sit down at the computer to write.

On a good night, my fingers fly. The feel of the keys stirs my imagination. I enter the spell of my stories. Characters fill my room with their voices, their yearnings, their miracles, their bodies. Plots unfold. Surprises emerge. What was ironic becomes eerie. What was fantastic becomes ordinary. I speculate, which stalls my writing, so I pick up on a character's lead. A line on the second page foresees the twist on page ten. They know more than I do.

After work, Gustav drives to the babysitter's and picks up her child. Her husband drives to Safeway. He yells hello when he drops the groceries on the kitchen counter. My friend, bent over the tub, answers. They change places. She cooks while he plays with the baby. They change places again. The baby clasps Gustav's fingers in her wee hands as she breast-feeds. Gustav's husband leafs through the bills. The baby is put in her crib. She

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cries. She stops. They eat. They each have a glass of wine. They leave the dishes. He falls asleep on the sofa. She wakes him up. They climb under the blankets together. Their limbs sprawl over one another as they sleep.

Meanwhile, my apartment is silent. My plate is clean in my dish drainer. I prop up my pillows and slide into bed, holding the pages of what I've written that night. I stretch my legs into the expansive warmth under my smooth, crisp sheets. I study my stories. When I drift to sleep, I'm relieved that there are no other legs to knock against.

Gustav tells me that all she wants is to sleep through the night. That's her prayer now, uttered at dawn as she whiffs the diapers and wipes the behind and plops into the rocker with the baby wailing into her neck.

I say my prayer when I flip the toggle switch on the back of my hard drive. The computer beeps and hums. My fingers poise above the keyboard. Writing is like the starlight game. Though the initial spark is too deep to distinguish, I know a thread of light must shine through each story. I open a new file, pray for the brilliance, and wait.

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SARA LONDON

Trespassing

Their dresses discarded,
deflated like angels wrecked ashore,
two women as naked as carp

breaststroke in the neighbor's pond,
their evening argument
drenched in self-consciousness.

He, dressed
and waiting on the docked raft,
follows the white streaks

of their bodies (his wife,
her sister), relishing the performance.
The one, forgetting her sad jealousies,

intoxicated with his gaze, rolls over,
blossoming into backstroke;
the other, permitting it,

prolongs her own perfected glide.
Lap after insistent lap
a continuous shedding,

until he calls them back,
begging them to come out now;
it is getting dark,

and he can hardly tell them apart;
he will leave
with their clothes.

His wife emerges, graceful, pale, and then

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the one he didn't choose, her breasts
proffering the day's lost light.

But as they step onto the banked grass,
bending like question marks to dress,
he begins losing them

to their other, familiar forms—
two answers,
one necessarily his.

NEAL BOWERS

Laps after Hours

The pool at 2 A.M. is full of the moon,
a tranced rectangle levitating smooth
in the stilled and amber-blinking city.
Caged in woven wire and locked away
like something dangerous or holy,
it shines bluegreen as poison
or the chipped baptismal tank
where the preacher drowns sin
on Sunday morning.

Pulled by the lovely risk, we climb over,
ease in without splashing,
our strokes a liquid rustling.
All around, the city hums
its numb slumber,
sea-rush of a giant shell,
as we exhaust ourselves with silence,
soundlessly swimming the lunar light
the way the dead tread space,
practicing.

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WILL WELLS

The Shadow Racers

Their Kansas farm too far from playmates
and oceans, they improvise a tag with light
and shadow—long afternoons when fleets
of clouds are driven over summer skies.

Sliding from the fence once the sun is blocked,
they drop onto the pasture's yielding grass
and race the surge of sunlight, a breathless
all out sprint to safe haven on the porch.

The light will swamp them if they're caught
between. Then they must float face down,
teased by weeds that any gust can coax
to swells unless new shadows break the spell.

Two girls, one boy, and the August doldrums.
All too soon, they'll follow in the wake
of combines well past dark, indentured
to grit and grain till the harvest is in.

On the dim porch deck, they fidget and lean,
drawn back to the white rail fence that rises,
a dangerous coast. Under cloud, they embark,
freighting dark cargo they cannot declare.

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JOHN DREXEL

Wholly Dedicated to a House

All winter I have sat, cold and still and liquid,
like a glass of vodka that does not need ice to chill it,
hoping against hope, daily expecting
your improbable return, waiting for you
to drink me as you did in the old nights.

Since that evening of the nameless men
out of the blue, taking you away,
locking you in ice, I have kept house,
a way of keeping faith
though little of you remains in the house
and little faith remains.
Look: here: in the desk:
your pen, your compass,
a packet of yellowing letters
open to no one's eyes, lodging
in my memory. Though you are voiceless
your words are singing here;
though I am silent I make a marriage of our words
inside my skull, my little house.

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PETER MAKUCK

My '49 Ford

Though Mom kept telling me I was lucky, that these years would be the best of my life, I didn't feel lucky at all, only glad to be driving. After three hours on the road, rain had sheeted down and left the pavement silver and black. Beads of water stood up nicely on the new wax of the louvered hood, but my rocker panels and bubble fender skirts would be filthy by the time we arrived. My father, clean-shaven, in a white shirt and tie, nodded sleepily in the back seat. My mother sat in front. She was crocheting as we sped past tall northern spruce. Her long piano fingers and crooking wrists used a single strand of black yarn to enlarge a pattern that rested in her lap. Suddenly she let out a bark of a laugh that tapered to a soft chuckle. I knew why: the restaurant where we just had lunch.

"Now don't look at me that way," she scolded. "You'll have an accident. I can't help it if I get a kick out of people." She tilted her head back, closed her eyes, and laughed again, the last part slurping like water down a drain. My expression must have made her laugh again. "Oh, you're just a sourpuss like your father."

"Ma, I didn't say nothin'."

"You didn't say *anything*. You're not with that stupid Road Devil gang now."

"Come on, Ma."

"You didn't say *anything*."

"Fine." I took a deep breath. "I didn't say *anything*."

"Ver-y good!" she sang. "Speech describes the mind. Keep talking like that, and they'll think you're a nitwit before you even take a test!"

She was in a good mood. I wasn't—I was nervous about the general and immediate future. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched her lean forward for her purse and begin to search it.

"Ma?"

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"What?"

"Don't take it wrong but—"

"Enough preface."

"I'd appreciate it, Ma, if you didn't smoke."

Her eyes got black as hornets; the mouth became a straight seam.

"Ma, everybody knows what those things do. Look at Uncle—"

"You look! You say you worry about my health—"

"I do."

"And I don't seem to listen, do I?"

"No, you don't."

"Now, do you ever listen to me? do what I want you to do?"

"Ma . . . you always pull this."

"Answer me."

"I try."

She laughed in contempt, the laugh becoming a long string of rachety coughs.

"See, see," I said. "We both know what causes that cough."

"Oh, do we?"

In the back seat, my father cleared his throat, a signal that we were getting on his nerves. God, why had I started this? But I hated smoke, I always had. At home, to some extent, I could at least escape by going into another room, yet even there the stink always found me.

"Oh you're an expert on causes. What caused the ten stitches in your head last Christmas? What caused the cops to bring you home at four o'clock in the morning that night last summer?"

"Ma, that's a smokescreen."

"Ha! I've raised a punster."

"Ma, we're not talking about the same thing, and you know it."

"Hey, knock it off," rumbled my father. "All you two ever do is go around in circles. Lay off."

She glowered, turned, and shot a black look at my father, but nothing more was said. We drove in silence. She lit up—she had to now. I knew that. And I knew the little perfumed pine tree of cardboard dangling under the dash was no match for the volume of smoke she would produce. I cracked the vent window.

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Smoke—it infuriated me. Once, I had made Peggy walk home from our parking place by the ocean because she thought she had me under her thumb and lit up when I told her not to, at least not in the car. What she was giving me wasn't worth the eye-burning smoke, and the lousy taste when we made out. And to top it off, she put her feet up on the dash, on the twenty coats of lacquer and custom pin-striping. She thought I was joking, but the look on her face changed when I began to drive away. It was dark and started to rain, and I should have gone back for her, but I couldn't. Maybe it had something to do with "Cathy's Clown," a maudlin tune often on the radio then, because a few days earlier I had let her borrow my car, and she left me stranded in town while she parked in front of the A & W with a few of her girl friends. She was seen. I was seen. She needed straightening out. I wasn't going to be anybody's clown.

Next time I saw her I was in wood shop, and classes were passing down the aisle between the open metals and woodworking areas. Dumfy said, "Here comes Peggy," but she paused only long enough to kill me with a look, and say with deep conviction, very deliberately, "You lousy shit!" A great chorus of "ooos" and "ahhs" went off with laughs and hoots from the guys.

All over a cigarette. And here I was in my own car, my mother puffing up a storm. Most often she only smoked when she read. She loved reading more than almost anything. A weekly trip to the library. Always books on the coffee table or nightstand. Reading engendered her best moods. When I wanted something, I always waited until she was reading. Interrupted, she would lift her gaze, the eyes clear and a bit dreamy, and her answer was most often yes. But when she was angry, her eyes seemed to blacken. Like the sky before a storm, like the sky we watched an hour ago at the knotty pine restaurant with its elk-antlered walls.

While my mother was being chatty and outgoing with the waitress and with the couple in the adjacent booth, I stared out the window at the inky sky and the shiny black asphalt, at my car—aquamarine, lowered, decked, frenched headlights, electric doors, customized floating bar grill, and '49 Plymouth bumpers, pleated and rolled Naugehyde interior. Last week, Donna had her hand on my thigh. Bouncing rain seemed to

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cover the ground with smoke; it tattooed the roof of my Ford as we talked of my leaving town, talked and kissed, kissed and stroked, our heads descending and coming up again in the faint light. It got hot, the windows steamed. Our clothes came off. Time, as in a film, took a leap. Sweating, I rolled down the window and felt the cool night air on my bare skin, confident that I had pulled out in plenty of time. But the last quarter turn of the window crank seemed to trigger a bright light that blasted me in the face. I lurched in the seat, bumping my head on the roof. Somehow, even in this scary moment, I realized that the perforated, white, Naugehyde headliner was probably stained from the stuff I used on my hair. Donna cried out and clutched loose clothing to herself so that I had to yank my trousers away from her. There was a silver badge; it hovered in the dark above the light, a patch of skin and a pair of eyes.

"OK, Romeo," said the gravel voice. "Get dressed and get out your driver's license." Mercifully, the light went out. I wiped the glass with the back of my hand and saw a black-and-white squad car blocking the tree-tunneled alley I had backed into. Donna giggled, but I didn't find it very funny. We were almost dressed when the cop came back. He held my license under the beam of a huge silver flashlight with a red plastic collar. Above the light beam floated a thick face with a bulldog mouth and bushy eyebrows that ran together above a flat knuckle of a nose. His name, I knew, was Hearn. I had seen him around, once or twice at the YMCA, grunting in the handball pit or hitting the heavy bag. And once I had seen him on Main Street with Cowboy Sheen. The Cowboy was a drunk in his fifties, a local character, harmless, who got into arguments with parking meters. I saw Hearn punch him in the face one April afternoon, drag him to the squad car unconscious and bloody, and heave him onto the floor of the back seat. Hearn was tight with another cop who lived only two houses away from us.

"I know your father," Hearn said.

I said nothing.

"Hey, Romeo, you hear me?"

I said yes.

"Has the Flying A station over on 10th, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he does."

"What would he say to this?"

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I didn't answer.

Hearn shined his light in my eyes. "Anh?"

"He wouldn't like it," I said.

"You damn straight he wouldn't like it." He shined the light on Donna's breasts. "What's your name, ah, young lady?" The light beam slowly descended to her crotch, lingered, then swung away.

"Donna Rodina." She folded her arms against the light.

"Rodino, anh?"

"R-o-d—"

"Don't worry, I can spell it. You want me to write it on the blottah, want to spell it for me down at the station?"

"No, I don't. I only—"

"I don't care what you *only*." He stood up for a moment so that only his belly hung in the window, yellow undershirt showing where a button had popped. "I know your fathah pretty well," he said, leaning down again and resting a hamfist on the window. I caught an odor of beer on his breath. "Your father, Angelo, and me went through hell together. You didn't know that, did you?"

Donna said she didn't. I thought of the war, of foxhole buddies.

"We was suspended between floors down in New Haven. In a elevatah. Twenty of us. One of the guys goes bananas, like he's got costophobia. But not really. He was a priest, planted there to test our mettle, see if we deserved to be Knights of Columbus. Your fathah's got mettle, young lady, you know that?"

Donna nodded.

That was a hot one, but I was glad she played along. Metal—that's what he had all right, a metal appendage to his right hand, a constant, patriotic can of Budweiser red-white-and-blue. The proof of his metal was a huge underslung belly like Hearn's. And those fuzzy Friday night K of C eyes. Yeah, a man of metal.

"What do you think Angelo, your father, would say about this business?"

Donna said nothing.

"I know what he'd say. He'd wring Romeo's neck here."

My face felt like the color of stock pulled from a forge in the

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metal shop. Hearn. I imagined applying a piece of red hot stock to his belly button. Hearn played the light over my pleated and rolled interior, the high pile carpets, the white headliner. "Nineteen forty-nine Ford. Hah! What color is this, green?"

"Aquamarine."

"Ooooh, aqua-marine," he mocked. "You think you're something with this niggermobile, don't you?"

I gritted my teeth. With the Corvette engine, Isky cam, and twin Edelbrock four barrels hidden under the hood, I knew I could blow that squad car off the road. I'd have loved to get him out on Cemetery Road and run him into the wall at the turn. Suddenly I thought about my Road Devils jacket and hoped it wasn't on the back seat. Hearn spoke again. "Some cops," he said, "would take you home in your birthday suit for mama and papa to see. But I don't work like that. First time, I like to give a guy an even break. But I might just have a talk with ya parents." He waited for a reaction then jerked his head forward into the window space to give us a final glare and blast of beerbreath. "Get ta hell outtah heah, and don't ever let me catch you in one of these Lovers' Lanes again. You hear me?"

I said yes but would be damned if I'd say *Gee wiz, thanks, Officer,*or something like that. Donna and I watched him waddle back to the squad car. I was grinding my teeth. Donna deepened her voice: "Hey, Romeo, am I an asshole or what?" Then we began laughing.

As I thought about it now, in the car with my parents, the episode was less funny than ever. Donna told me she would write to me when her "friend" arrived at the end of the month. The sex part of it would turn my mother's mouth into a downhooked didactic scar. And my father would be more furious if Hearn showed up at the station, swaggered into the office, hitched up his holster, and leaned against the cigarette machine, squad car idling outside, antenna still twitching. My father had little use for the police and what they did, the way they loved to loom in your path. What they did, my father once said in disgust, was take: free this, free that. And during the war when tires were rationed, our neighbor, a cop, sold them out of his cellar. And where did they come from? My mother protested: "He'll have no respect for the law if you go on like

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this." My father scoffed: "*They* have no respect for the law. Anyway, they're just people," he said, softening things. "Some good, some bad. Just like the nuns and priests." I watched my mother's face redden. "You leave the Church out of this!" Her face was stricken, jaw slack. But when the words came and rained off his back, I watched my father retreat to his basement workshop. That was his sanctuary. She never followed. The workshop with its fragrance of freshly cut wood ended most arguments, my father conceding the last word to my mother. His tools hung neatly from brass hooks. My mother's tools were of a different order.

Again, as we rolled past a lake with a distant horizon darkpointed with fir and spruce, my mother closed her eyes and laughed, breaking a long silence. I knew she was still thinking about the knotty pine restaurant. "Boy oh boy! Those people were real doozies." She snickered quietly. "Weren't they, Fred?"

I saw my father straighten in the rearview, adjust the starched white collar tight around his neck. My father's name was Leo, but years ago, as a joke, my mother began calling him Fred and it stuck—with almost everyone but my maiden aunts. My father looked uncomfortable, not from the joking, but from the clothes he was wearing. I rarely saw him dressed up, except for Mass, but most often he went to church early, alone, in work clothes, for Sunday also saw him at the garage.

"Timmy, your father has no sense of humor." Turning in her seat to see his unsmiling face, she laughed again, seeming to find something more deeply humorous. I could scarcely believe what humor my mother found in such minor incidents, but humor, of course, is subjective, my father and I often laughing ourselves to tears at The Three Stooges. My mother, though, would be on the phone as soon as she and Dad returned home, was probably already rehearsing for her friends the story about the man and woman with the dog in the knotty pine restaurant. "Is that a poodle?" my mother had asked.

"No, a snoodle."

"A what?"

"A snoodle. It's a cross between a poodle and a schnauzer."

I saw her bite the corner of her lip to keep from laughing. Then she said: "Dogs are wonderful companions."

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"Ain't dat da troof."

"They're nicer than a lot of people I know."

The man and his wife beamed in agreement.

"They're grateful, and they won't argue with you."

"You can say that again." The woman wore a red turtleneck sweater like the one on the dog; she was warming to a favorite subject and said they had another dog, a Lakeland terrier, that was registered, had fine bloodlines, and was very expensive. I knew my mother was delighted because she thought anyone who spent a lot of money for a nervous unfriendly thoroughbred was a damned fool. The woman held the dog in her lap and there was something oddly similar about their faces: the moist sad eyes, a pompom of gray hair. The woman leaned forward and in a high voice not her own began to ventriloquize: "You just say, My name is Mimi. You say, I'm four years old. You say, I'm just the sweetest little snoodle in the world. Say—" The dog didn't, of course, say anything, but it began barking and jumped on the table, upsetting a bowl of New England clam chowder, dumping it into the man's lap, making the couple argue, the husband saying they should have left the damned dog in the car.

"Fred?"

"What?"

"Didn't you like that little snoodle?"

"Loved it. We ought to get two or three just like it."

She began gasping with laughter. My father, raised on a farm, wasn't sentimental about animals. In fact, every time my dog Sargent puked in the house or left hairs on one of the good chairs, Dad swatted him with a newspaper. Then he'd declare that my mother and I were damned fools. Each time, Mom and I would share hushed, conspiratorial laughter because we knew my father's annoyance was no joke.

"You know, Fred, I think you don't like it because that man said 'troof' for 'truth' and 'dat' for 'that.' They probably say 'stoonz' for 'students' too, you know, like your relatives from New Britain."

"Lay off my relatives, will ya!"

My mother, getting the rise she was after, covered her mouth with her hand and gasped with laughter that turned to violent coughing.

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At a smooth plenty-in-reserve 60 mph, I took the Ford over a great high-humped bridge of verdigris-covered ironwork with lots of X-ed girders. At the far side was a sign: WELCOME TO MAINE: VACATIONLAND. But this was no vacation. I had never been this far from home, and a sense of distance and unfriendly space began to haunt me. The color of the bridge was like the copper-green waterdrip tail on the porcelain of our sink. And the same color on the license attached to Sargent's collar. The dog was old; it might die while I was gone. I downshifted at the traffic circle, noticing the state trooper parked on the median, and kept the rpm's up so that the dual glasspacks wouldn't back off and get me stopped.

"Don't take the turnpike," my father said, and I smoothly swung to the right, dropping it into third long before the engine peaked to keep my father happy. And quiet.

"Maine," my mother sighed, her eyes misted. " 'Beginnings are always delightful,' the poet says."

My father made a chuff sound through his nose: mockery. "Years ago, when I left the farm, my mother and father, brothers and sisters, to go to work in Rhode Island, the beginning wasn't delightful. It was the Depression and I didn't know what the hell I was in for."

My mother went on as if nobody had spoken. "Yes, delightful," she said. I felt her eyes on me. "Timmy, this is a beginning for you." She sniffed. "And for us."

Suddenly my mood felt fragile. "Come on, Ma. Knock it off. You said you wouldn't start."

"Timmy, there is nothing wrong with having emotions."

"Ma."

"OK, OK, but it's going to be awfully hard for me. Your father goes to work. He'll have things to do but—"

"Ma—"

"All right, that's it, no more." She blew her nose. "The philosopher says it's better to be a *monstre gai* than an *ennuyeux sentimental*." She blew again. "Right, Fred?"

"Of course."

My mother asked me if I knew what those words meant. I said I didn't, and she explained the phrases. "You better be ready to hear some French up here," she said. Her eyes were gleaming again.

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"Yeah, I know."

She said she'd control herself from now on, but I knew better. She always gave in to the relief of sentimentality. I considered my parents and sensed their absence would be a great relief. I was supposed to miss Donna, but didn't. Not yet at least. With her, in the car, I was charmed by her every movement. But if I loved her, why did I feel so good when she got out of the car at midnight? High, excited, her scent still on my fingers when I pulled from her house, a good tune on the radio? Alone, how good it was to stop on a back road, look up at stars, the air fresh, pressure easing on my bladder, silence amplifying the hiss and sizzle of the asphalt. Moments like this wore a great halo. Moments of true feeling. But then, in the parking lot behind the A & W, with the guys, a beer in hand, could it really be me, the same person, who told the anecdote about Hearn surprising me and Donna? And wasn't there a slimy sense of betrayal?

I looked at my father's serious face in the rearview. My father rarely told stories, and if he did, they were very short. One thing I knew I would definitely miss was the Ford. At State U a car would have been permitted. But my parents decided, me being me, not to send me to State where I would be with guys I'd gotten in trouble with, where I would be too close to home and Donna—everything just an extension of high school, especially with the car I lavished so much time on. "We are not," they said, "going to flush our money down the toilet." So the aquamarine Ford that I had customized in auto-mechanics class and at my father's station, the Ford I had powered with a Corvette engine would be returning home. I didn't want to think about it. I was, the further I drove, becoming detached from my normal self.

"Tim, honey, what's the matter?"

"Nothing." *Timmy, honey, dear, sweetheart*—those words set me off for some reason.

"Nothing? You're scowling, you're forehead's all wrinkled."

I looked at her, then back at the road.

"You haven't said a word in ten minutes."

"Hey, Ma, change the record, huh?"

"Listen, Mister Mouth, you're not talking to Fagan or Dumfy. Or,"—she changed her tone—"Donna for that matter."

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"What are you dragging Donna into this for?"

"Don't tell me you're not thinking about her?"

"What if I am?" God, I hated having somebody, especially my mother, tell me what I was thinking about, hated having to surrender my car, wished I could have travelled up here by myself, arrived on a Greyhound, emerging in the strange little town with a suitcase in one hand, jacket slung over my shoulder. Like the movies. But this wasn't the movies, and once I agreed to the plan, I had to play by their rules because they were paying the bills. For now at least.

"Donna's not"—she stared at the pattern of yarn in her lap—"she's just not the right girl for you, and I hope I don't ever have to say *I told you so.*"

I began to object.

"That girl's mother, Timmy, went to school with me and—"

"And what?" I couldn't believe I was having this conversation; I had a panicky feeling of being trapped in an endless car trip with my parents, doomed forever to be told of mistakes I *had* made, mistakes I *would* make, pride preventing me from admitting certain things about Donna, her mother.

"That girl just wants to get married."

I asked if there was something wrong with that.

"Not at the right time, not after you've got a decent education. Let that girl get her hooks into you, and you'll be working at the shipyard like everyone else. Day after boring day. Your father worked there, but he had the courage to quit. He can tell you what it's like over there. Can't you, Fred?"

"Your mother's right."

"Money isn't everything."

"Ma, I've heard this record before."

There was a moment of silence. I thought she might let it pass. Then: "That's the second time you've used that expression."

"What?"

"About changing the record."

"I'm sorry."

"You ought to be. It shows lack of imagination." She looked at the slow back-sweeping salt marsh already touched with seasonal brown. "You do what you want. I won't mention it again."

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I looked at my father in the rearview. His eyes were gray and soft and had crow's-feet at the corners. Very infrequently he smoked a pipe in his workshop, and somehow I didn't mind the smoke, which was richer; and the pipe gave him a meditative look. Sometimes, as now, I felt the full weight of his silence, was troubled by it, admired it, and sometimes tried, when with my friends, to affect it. My father seemed to be enjoying the shore route that was punctuated with small towns, antique barns, clam and lobster stands. On a bridge, my mother noticed another bridge off to the left and the faster flow of turnpike cars. She was annoyed and said scenery was just the kind of thing my father would want when they had no time for it. She shook her head and sighed heavily, filling the car with tense miles of silence.

The curving shore road gave me something to do, allowed me to downshift and feel the car, enjoy it one last time. But soon the rocky coast which I had never seen, the wave crash and high-flung spray took my attention as well. I wished Donna could see it. The ocean and coast were much more dramatic than the coast at home, protected as it was by that long low smudge on the horizon: Long Island, visible on clear days. The road was winding past natural coves and harbors where lobster boats with squarish cuddies and twin booms swayed on their reflections next to dockside fish shacks the color of driftwood. There were hanging nets and stacks of traps and the late-summer air screamed with gulls. The hooking road pushed a different seascape before us at every turn; it would be a village and salt-stunted trees, and suddenly an endless spread of white caps on curling blue-black. Along one stretch of beach there was a tall tree all by itself, its branches and trunk twisted by the great offshore wind; it was odd and lonely because larger than anything I had seen for miles. The houses too seemed lonely, widely spaced, and encircled by their white picket fences; they were like the shells of quahogs randomly arranged by children on a treeless hillside, dormer window staring blankly at the changing sea. Out on the tidal flats was a high-sided truck where a family of kelpers was forking up seaweed to a figure standing on top of the pile.

"Harvesting the sea," said my mother.

"They must sell it," said my father.

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"Looks like a painting," said my mother.

"Reminds me of haying as a kid," said my father. "Break your back."

After another mile or two was an arrow and a sign which said: COLLEGE SAINT ANTOINE.

My mother was satisfied. "It's as pretty as the pictures in the catalog, don't you think so, Timmy?"

I said yes, though I hadn't really studied the catalog. My father and I lugged my footlocker up to the third floor of Padua Hall, met the prefect, a young Franciscan robed in brown with a white knotted cord for a belt. His name was Father André and he spoke English with an accent. He introduced me to my roommates, Bernard and Jacques. Bernard pointed to a bulbless socket in the ceiling. All three spoke French until Father André turned to me with a big smile and asked if I understood. I said no, I had studied Spanish. He laughed and teasingly said Spanish wouldn't help much around here. I vaguely knew about the ethnic character of the college but was now overwhelmed with a sense of the foreign.

I walked with my parents out to a point that hooked into the river and made a small harbor. I looked back at the green watertower we drove past near the entrance to campus. There was a gazebo and a boathouse at the point, and to the east, at the mouth of the river, the dark fluting of the Atlantic visible beyond a long stone jetty.

Back in the parking lot, I noticed two students appraising my Ford. "Hey, I bet dat car she really go." It was the same accent Father André had when he spoke English.

My mother said, "Your father's right. We shouldn't argue. God forbid we should have an accident on the way home."

I told her not to talk like that.

"I can't help it. These thoughts just come."

I took a deep breath. The sky, still flocked with clouds, seemed suddenly sullen again. There was little left to say, yet no one seemed ready to say goodbye. My father finally said, "Well, we better be getting back. Long ride. I gotta work tomorrow."

I looked at my mother. For the first time I noticed faint lines of crow's-feet, a thread or two of gray in her hair. Behind her glasses, the eyes swam into focus, then went distant. She

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gathered me in a strong hug and kissed me. When she spoke, her mouth, from a breath mint, was an alarming green. "Timmy, be a"—tears slid down her rouged cheeks—"a good boy. Stay out of trouble. Your father and I love you very much."

I said I'd be good but, what with my track record, I wondered how they could believe me, let alone tell me they loved me. It surprised me that my voice came out strangely, sounded wrong, as it had when first changing. My breath came hard. I tried to smile, but my face wouldn't obey. My nose felt sneezy and began to run. "Just do your best," said my father, extending a big shovel of a hand. I could not look him in the face. My heart knocked in my ears as it did when I knew a fistfight was close. I tried hard to concentrate on what my father said. "Your best is all we ask. Nothing else matters."

The electric doors popped, and my father got behind the wheel. Nervous phrases flew back and forth. My mother's green mouth opened and closed. Tears ran. The big Corvette engine vroomed. I watched the aquamarine Ford rumble out of the lot; it was eclipsed by the white administration building on the knoll and reappeared on the long straight high road into town, flashing before a wall of huge green firs. As I watched the bright piece of color growing small, all that horsepower elsewhere, I felt myself shrinking, weak. I watched until it was totally gone and after a time discovered myself looking at the sky and a flotilla of clouds moving seaward on a high blue journey. Like them, I felt blown along, felt myself caught in a wild gust of unknown feeling.

"Jesus," I said, "O Jesus."

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Resurfacing

EACH OF NEW YORK'S BIG BALLET COMPANIES is always struggling to create a separate identity for what it does, while maintaining its links with something bigger and even more unnameable called "ballet." In the past year, as the dance and culture worlds staggered under the triple handicap of AIDS, funding cuts, and the new puritanism, American Ballet Theater and the New York City Ballet resolutely cast their nets for the new support they must attract. Both companies have been through nearly a decade of wavering popularity and are searching for clear new artistic policies. NYCB has been slowly emerging from the loss of its founder and principal choreographer George Balanchine, while ABT examined the nature and needs of classical ballet in the modern world. Both companies have undergone major shifts in management and are attempting to conjure a working premise for themselves out of their past successes—and also project some vistas for ballet in the future. Above all, they both need a formula for filling those expensive and all-important seats, 3,000 of them a night in the New York State Theater and 4,000 at the Metropolitan Opera House. In their nearly concurrent spring seasons, neither one of them fared very well at the box office. More and more, I wonder whether big ballet is simply becoming obsolete.

Ballet Theater has made dramatic changes since Jane Hermann took over the company last year. She now lists herself, with long-time ABT chieftain Oliver Smith, as Director, and has purged potentially unfriendly voices from both administrative and artistic departments. Hermann's stated objective when she came in was to lower the deficit, and she seems to feel the best way to do this is to return to Ballet Theater's past incarnations as a purveyor of lavish classical ballets and romances, with world-famous stars in the leading roles. This isn't any more frugal than what the company was doing before Hermann arrived.

In the arts, the equation between income and product can be about as predictable as roulette. What costs big bucks to put on a stage may not bring in paying customers, while a comparatively modest attraction can be a hit. Ballet Theater's ostentatious three-year-old Christian Lacroix *Gaîté Parisienne* looks as dated and silly today as a 1988 Lacroix party dress would in the audience. New costumes and sets make very little difference in the quality of *Coppélia*; do they really draw enough patrons to justify their cost? The audience for one kind

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of spectacle may be indifferent to the next. Ballet companies have always had to find a balance between novelty-seekers and loyal, long-term fans, and their most serious problem is finding and nurturing choreographic talent that the audience will be willing to follow. Ballet Theater has none of this at the moment. It's not even making feeble gestures at giving its own dancers a chance to choreograph.

Two-thirds of the 1991 ABT New York season was devoted to four full-length nineteenth-century ballets (*Coppélia*, *Don Quixote*, *La Bayadère* and *Giselle*) and a twentieth-century facsimile, Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet*. The remaining 26 performances featured mixed bills of 15 one-act ballets and two other nineteenth-century excerpts. Only five of the shorter works could remotely be called contemporary, four by Twyla Tharp and one by Mark Morris. Of the rest, Jiri Kylian's *Sinfonietta* is going on fifteen years old, and the others dodder back from there into antiquity. Gone are the postmodern choreographies commissioned by Mikhail Baryshnikov during his nine-year reign as artistic director. Gone too are Baryshnikov's imaginative efforts to modernize and diversify the company. Only two years ago ABT was performing dances by Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, George Balanchine, Clark Tippett. Most of that has been phased out, and it seems Tharp will soon withdraw two or three more of her remaining ballets. Everything, in fact, that might have reminded the audience that it and the dancers have a contemporary existence in common has been banished. The 50th anniversary souvenir program book with the soft-porn Annie Leibovitz photographs of all the company bigwigs in perfume-ad poses and the middle-rank dancers in peekaboo déshabille is now a collector's item, replaced by a brochure featuring synopses of the fairy tales and dreary head shots of the dancers.

All this proclaims Ballet Theater's determination to be known as a classical company in the most regressive sense. Though Hermann would be the last to acknowledge her predecessor's contribution to this conservative agenda, Baryshnikov's persistent attention to the training of the corps de ballet turned it into a scrupulously technical instrument, indispensable to the credible execution of the classics though often unsung. By the end of the 1991 season, what with the guest and resident stars dragging acquiescent conductors through any sort of tempi they desired while hogging all the bravos, the corps was once more disintegrating into a ragged, lackadaisical crew.

The classics according to Hermann are fancy platters heaped with dancing, garnished here and there with plot. If these ballets were ever really unified choreographed entities in the first place, they've now become icons, displaying certain incantatory scenes, gestures, atmospheres. *Giselle* must have its peasants and wilis, its mad scene and its repentent playboy aristocrat. *La Bayadère* is synonymous with its 24 Shades descending the ramp, then posing and balancing in perfect

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celestial accord. Beyond those signature elements a classic is anybody's ball game. Its choreography will have been so thoroughly effaced by time that no one feels the slightest hesitation about inserting new bits, rechoreographing from memory, shifting scenes around, throwing out steps they don't feel like doing and substituting what they like better.

I think George Balanchine's scorn for the creaky old potboilers was what led him throughout his lifetime to seek concise, gripping alternatives. New York City Ballet's *Sleeping Beauty* has been in the discussion stage for years: Balanchine himself set the Garland Dance, for 16 children and 16 couples from the corps, in 1981, but who knows if he ever would have reconstructed the entire ballet? Peter Martins, now sole head of City Ballet following the retirements of Jerome Robbins and Lincoln Kirstein, wanted to rehabilitate *Beauty* without losing its character, somehow to make a Balanchinian all-dance work out of it. What resulted was a curious and unsettling mixture. When the curtain rose on the Prologue's sumptuous court scene (called Act I, The Christening in this version), I felt an almost overwhelming dismay at the sight of this most original of ballet companies dealing in the mundane currency of nineteenth-century repertory.

Balanchine did revert to the classics on occasion—his *Nutcracker*, of course, is pure nostalgia. But he was more likely to renovate them in his own eccentric ways. He made a cleaned-up, nontraditional *Coppélia*, turned *Don Quixote* into a gothic nightmare, and staged four or five brilliant *Raymonda* one-acts as well as glosses on *Swan Lake*, *La Sylphide*, and others. I think Peter Martins was going for a similar revisionism in *Sleeping Beauty*. He made a virtue of what was termed streamlining. This meant nonstop dancing and elimination of the dramatics and other passages that, according to Balanchine doctrine, slow down the old ballets without adding anything. In the event, however, the tempi were pressured and the dancing looked less like Balanchinian panache than undue haste.

One reason for the survival of *Sleeping Beauty* is its tremendous variety and scale. It has peasant dances and court dances and a classical corps de ballet and eighteenth-century social dances. (The omission of the latter, in the hunting scene, was Martins' most regrettable economy.) It has virtuosity and magic, civility and charm, spectacular stage business and tiny, detailed solo dancing. Martins seemed to be trying to even out the stylistic disparities in the ballet, to make it a more unified exposé of classical style. The headlong pace piled one number on top of another without a break, so that the audience couldn't catch its breath and savor what it had seen. Without the texture and stage illusions of the traditional *Sleeping Beauty*, this seemed like a longer than ordinary evening of dancing. Some people liked the use of slide projections successively approaching the palace or showing the vines grow up around it. I thought this technological

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gimmick conflicted with the nineteenth-century aesthetic underlying the reconstruction.

Sleeping Beauty, of course, provides new challenges for the dancers, and the two Auroras I saw, Kyra Nichols and Judith Fugate, were as good as I expected them to be. Helene Alexopoulos surprised me, though, as a commanding, serene Lilac Fairy; and Merrill Ashley revealed a splendid gift for character in the mime role of Carabosse, the evil fairy. Propelled by their successes in *Beauty*, Fugate and Alexopoulos seemed to soar through the rest of the season with new confidence and technical assurance.

Dancing is really what the New York City Ballet is all about, and Balanchine's legacy of ballets continues to inspire sublime performances. But this season, only a little more than half the ballets in the seven weeks following *Beauty* were by Balanchine, the rest coming largely from Martins and Robbins. As the Balanchine component of the NYCB repertory diminishes, not only do the demands on the dancers and the audience ease up, the company itself gradually changes. Today there are fewer dancers who can do Balanchine superbly; the Balanchine rep is slightly less convincing.

Martins continued his choreographic investigations into a speeded-up modernism with *Ash*, to yet another gratuitous score of repetitious but arhythmic declamatory bytes by Michael Torke. In Europe, where all dance is seen as ideology, classical ballet represents an imperialistic oppression, and the contemporary choreographer's job is to exact reparations. The gaunt, fast grapplings distilled from the classical pas de deux, the harsh, distorted shapes, the reduction of phrasing to its propulsive usefulness have been adopted by Peter Martins in his leotard ballets. Unlike the current leader of the European modernists, William Forsythe, Martins isn't deliberately shocking or inscrutable. He softens his anti-classicism with reason. *Ash* is almost obsessively designed in space and uses a vocabulary of big jumps and multiple turns that don't stop for breath. You see the expansion, the speed, the physicality that Balanchine exploited throughout his career, but finesse, wit and virtuosity are replaced by an organized eroticism.

Wendy Whelan and Nilas Martins, who led the ensemble of four couples, represent the second generation of an evolving new look in NYCB dancers. Whelan physically resembles the prototype of Martins' dry, elastic modern ballerinas, Heather Watts, though she's younger and stronger technically. At the end of the season she was rewarded with a promotion to principal dancer. Nilas Martins, perhaps not incidentally the son of the company director, was moving up into major roles all during the season. In looks he resembles his handsome father, but he lacks the intensity and the grounded sense of weight that made Peter Martins simultaneously authoritative and sexy as a dancer.

The younger Martins made a surprisingly decent debut in *Apollo*, the mere thought of which outraged some Balanchinians. Obviously

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he had been well-coached in one of his father's most famous roles, but he was unable to rouse himself from his habitual impassivity, even when Darci Kistler, his Terpsichore, smirked and flirted with him like a prom queen. Kistler seems frozen now into a perpetual elation; she seems to be working at looking glorious and unable to let her dancing speak for itself.

The search for an accommodation between classicism and modernity, decorum and flamboyance, is a central preoccupation at both NYCB and ABT. In the absence of choreographic inspiration, style is the hot issue. Both companies have a good supply of classical dancers now, and the Balanchine works show them off. But ABT's one "new" piece of the season was a pedantic pastiche from the third act of *Raymonda* by Fernando Bujones. Enrique Martinez's tired-looking touchup of *Coppélia* and Vladimir Vasiliev's chaotic restaging of *Don Quixote* were the other novelties. No wonder the company called on personalities to sell its season.

Sylvie Guillem, one of the season's visiting box office attractions, wore what must have been her own, entirely mismatching costume, and adjusted *Don Quixote* to suit her sure-fire if somewhat limited technical tricks, junking one of the best-known variations entirely. Guillem played the Spanish innkeeper's daughter as an all-purpose, willful peasant girl. She could have stepped into *Coppélia* or *La Fille Mal Gardée* without any trouble. Guillem's performances sold well, as most of the other season attractions did not, and the kind of success she had not only encouraged the sensation-hungry audience. It helped reinstitutionalize star behavior as a role model for the dancers.

Ballet Theater has developed a few big stars from its own ranks, Cynthia Gregory and Fernando Bujones among them. I didn't see Bujones in the few performances he did before he was injured, but Gregory was carrying on her usual love affair with the audience, capped by a sold-out farewell performance of the second act of *Swan Lake*. Gregory has been known for her superstrong, smooth technique. She made the act of balancing on one toe an endurance contest, always capped by a triumphant knowing smile. In the 1991 season this trick was tried by women at every opportunity.

Dancers in principal roles were encouraged not only to show off but to indulge in temperament. Julio Bocca, the young Argentinian phenomenon, is allowed an apparently free rein. Backstage scuttlebutt is full of his refusals to dance—Tharp's *Brief Fling*, for instance, was made on him last year, but now he thinks it's bad for his form. Onstage, his form in *Romeo* the night I saw him consisted of passionate tossings of the head and a minimum of dancing power. Another night, in *La Bayadère*, he insisted on twirling Cynthia Harvey for a few extra pirouettes that made the conductor wait a couple of beats before finishing the phrase. Twice, later on in the same performance, he gestured and hissed audibly from the stage to get the conductor to speed up his tempi.

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It's a mystery to me that, although both ABT and NYCB have ballets in a range of periods and styles, neither company seems to prepare dancers stylistically or dramatically in an organized way. Dancers, left to their own devices, imitate what they've seen other dancers do successfully with a role, but we seldom see an interpretation that looks carefully thought-out. When a dancer seizes a role, as Merrill Ashley did with Carabosse, not only is a new facet of that dancer revealed. The role's familiarity gets wiped away and we can see new things in it. Kevin O'Day, one of the Twyla Tharp dancers who joined Ballet Theater during the attempted ABT-Tharp merger, has worked his way into a number of character roles in the repertory. His rendition of the Friend who rescues Hagar from spinsterhood in *Pillar of Fire* was just such a revelation. O'Day stressed the dancing elements in what is usually done as a mimed role, and made me feel for the first time ever that the Friend's interest in Hagar was more than platonic.

And throughout the season Victor Barbee reanimated stereotyped character roles with loving specificity. As the High Brahmin in *Bayadère* he gave no hint of the pompous lecher we usually see; instead he seemed dismayed and tortured by the conflict between his spirituality and his unrequited love for Nikiya. His Doctor Coppelius was dotty and irascible enough not to be cute. Barbee greatly enlivened the second act by actually dancing the duets with the doll he thought had come to life. His physicality made the irony of Swanilda's deception even more poignant. His Gamache in *Don Quixote* was not just a fop but a nouveau riche who hadn't succeeded in covering up his gutter origins. And as Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* he was arrogant, spoiled, aggressive. If I could see all the characters in these old ballets danced and acted with such care, I might appreciate them more.

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RICHARD HORNBY

Broadway Economics

MOST EXTANT BROADWAY THEATRES were built in the twenties. In those days, theatre was so profitable that you could recover the cost of the building after only two years of operation. An individual play could recover *its* costs in six or seven weeks. In a typical season, which ran only nine or ten months (before air conditioning, most New York theatres closed in the summertime), over two hundred new plays would open. The top ticket price was usually two dollars.

Today, Broadway theatres sit empty for long periods of time, many of them for years. Some have been torn down. A typical season consists of two dozen new productions rather than two hundred. As Frank Rich pointed out in the *Times*, the situation is so meager that in many categories of the Tony Awards, every single play that opened gets nominated. The top ticket price is now about forty dollars for a straight play, or sixty for a musical—and a hundred for *Miss Saigon*. Even so, plays take many months to recover their initial costs, and some big musicals sell out for years without ever showing a profit.

What are the reasons for this deplorable state of affairs? As with other declining American industries, they boil down to inflexibility, stupidity, and greed. When profits decline, it is much easier just to raise prices than to overhaul your operation. Higher prices lead to a decline in sales, which, in a vigorous industry, would lead to price cuts, but in a decrepit one bring on further price *increases*, in a vicious circle.

Two villains are usually cited as being mainly responsible for the decline of Broadway: the theatre owners and the theatrical unions. Almost all Broadway theatres are owned by just three firms; they certainly do not compete with one another on price. Tickets just went up about nine percent, for example, in the face of the worst recession in the New York area in decades. Nor will a theatre owner just rent out his theatre to the highest bidder; he wants a piece of the action, typically taking forty or fifty percent of the gross profits, and he will reserve the right to close a show the minute the house is less than a hundred percent full.

Similarly, the unions have insisted again and again on high wage increases; their members apparently prefer to work intermittently (if ever!) at high salaries rather than regularly at more modest ones, just as the owners prefer to keep their theatres dark while waiting for the blockbuster show. And, as with other decrepit industries, there is

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hardly ever a strike; the producers and owners just pass on the costs to the consumer, in the form of outrageous ticket prices. There was a time when ordinary, middle-class people went regularly to the theatre in New York, as they still do in the other theatrical capitals of the world. No longer. Today, the Broadway theatre is a tourist theatre. After air fares, restaurant meals, and hotel costs, a few hundred dollars for theatre tickets does not seem so high. But theatre is no longer central to New York culture, just as caviar is not part of the typical New Yorker's diet.

Until recently, there seemed no way out of this hopeless economic decline. I was delightfully surprised, therefore, when a new funding plan, called the Broadway Alliance, made it possible to cut ticket prices almost in half (to $24, which is lower than *off*-Broadway), while greatly reducing the risks of producing serious, non-musical plays. In two years of negotiations with owners, producers, and the theatrical unions, Robert Whitehead, the most enlightened of New York producers, managed to hammer out a plan whereby everyone—playwrights, actors, directors, designers, technicians—took a cut in pay. For example, the Actors' Equity minimum for Broadway actors this season was $850 per week;[1] under the Alliance, it was $637, which is a significant drop, yet more than an actor can make off-Broadway, and a lot more than he or she can get on unemployment!

As for the theatre owners, they agreed to make available three theatres (the Belasco, the Nederlander, and the Walter Kerr) for no rent until a production recovers its costs. These are all lovely, historic theatres, which are perfectly functional, but rarely used because of their locations. In New York, the desirability of a theatre is inversely proportional to its distance from Shubert Alley, between 44th and 45th Streets just west of Broadway. The Alliance theatres have the misfortune of being a few blocks off the beaten path, which did not use to matter much (many famous plays were first performed in them), but which today keeps the wrecker's ball swinging precariously close.

I missed the first play to be done under the Alliance, *The Speed of Darkness*, which closed after a short run while I was out of town. I did manage to get to the second offering, Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*, and was very favorably impressed. Set in Australia in 1788, the play concerns a group of recently-arrived male and female convicts who stage a production of Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*. Unlikely as this sounds, it is based on an actual incident, which inspired Thomas Keneally's novel *The Playmaker*, from which Wertenbaker adapted her script. A major theme in the play is the incredible

[1] It was casually increased at the end of June to $900, a raise of six percent. By contrast, movie producers boycotted New York for six months to force their unions to accept *concessions*. The result will probably be fewer stage productions than ever, but there is already a spate of new films—and a film role for me.

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class difference between the snobbish officers who are running the colony and the troglodytes in their custody, who unceasingly lie, cheat, and physically abuse one another. Ultimately, however, the play is not so much about class differences as it is about the transformational power of theatre. The young lieutenant who comes up with the playacting scheme argues that it will civilize the convicts. In the end it does, not just in the way he intends, by making them cleaner and gentler, but also by making them begin questioning their conditions and the social order behind them. From self-centered brutes they become, in effect, citizens.

An amusing aspect of the play is the way the performers, although largely illiterate and totally unfamiliar with the stage, fall into the kind of behavior characteristic of actors everywhere, fighting to get cast, complaining about the size of their roles, and suggesting "improvements" in the dialogue or action. They relate the problems of the characters in *Recruiting Officer* to their own lives, and even manage to engage in literary criticism: Should plays be set in the past? Should they reflect life as it really is, as one convict argues, or should they give perspective to life, as another insists? These are, of course, the very questions that scholars and professional critics have been asking for millennia, but Wertenbaker gracefully shows them arising from the process of rehearsal, where the necessity of confronting the dramatic material, over and over in all its details, has an inevitable educational effect.

The actors of *Our Country's Good* are from the Hartford Stage Company, under the direction of Mark Lamos. This is an outstanding regional company, with a superior standard of acting. Peter Frechette was sensitive and revealing as the stage-struck lieutenant, while Tracey Ellis, as the convict-actress with whom he falls in love, gave a spare, unsentimental, yet emotionally truthful performance. Many of the cast doubled as both officers and convicts, which they did so well that I did not figure who everyone really was until well into the second act. Richard Poe, as the thoughtful governor of the colony, and as one of the few literate convicts, a Jew who has read Johnson's dictionary, was particularly impressive in his ability to play contrasting characters, as was Sam Tsoutsouvas as a beautifully-spoken aristocrat and a roguish pickpocket. A black actor, Gregory Wallace, played an aboriginal Australian and a snobbish, racist captain, a nice bit of irony that shows how interracial casting can be used for artistic effect.

There was not a weak link in the entire cast of ten; the only "flaw" in the acting was a tendency toward too much accuracy with the convicts' sores, missing teeth, ragged clothing, and general filth. Suggestiveness is needed with such elements; overenthusiastic naturalism calls too much attention to itself, as Stanislavski said, like a real nose stuck in the midst of a realistic portrait. Similarly, the low-class accents were too accurate, which meant at times that they were

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incomprehensible; accents should never be played for their own sake, unless you are doing *Pygmalion*.

The rules of the Alliance call for plays to be done with a single set. Designer Christopher Barreca made the odd choice of filling much of the stage with the skeleton of a ship, even though most of the play takes place after the convicts have landed. Yet the ship gave the whole play a remote, forlorn, castaway feeling that was effective. It was an example of how suggestiveness, rather than literalness, is almost always the best route to go in the theatre, in contrast to film, a more naturalistic medium.

Sad to say, *Our Country's Good* flopped, closing after 12 previews and 48 performances. Many reasons were cited, including lack of an adequate advertising budget (maximum costs should probably be adjusted upward to allow for this), and the failure to win a Tony Award, another decrepit Broadway institution that needs overhauling. But the most outlandish explanation came from Alan Eisenberg, executive secretary of Actors' Equity: the play had too many actors! Equity must be the only union in the world that would complain about having too many of its members employed.

The funniest play on Broadway since *Lend Me a Tenor* closed was Paul Rudnick's *I Hate Hamlet*, which opened in April. A ghost story in the tradition of *Blithe Spirit* or *Topper* (or *Hamlet* itself, for that matter), in which the dead return to guide the living, Rudnick's comedy has the ghost of John Barrymore return to help a young actor play Hamlet in Central Park. Among other things, the concept provides a marvelous opportunity to contrast two kinds of acting, the open, grand style of Barrymore, and the naturalistic, introspective style of most American actors today.

The young actor, Andrew Rally, has had his television series canceled. His agent gets him the Hamlet role almost against his will; he knows nothing about how to perform Shakespeare, and does not even like the play (hence the *I Hate Hamlet* title). This is an astute piece of satire, because he is exactly the kind of actor whom Joseph Papp usually hires for the New York Shakespeare Festival, as I have been complaining for years. The only element that is false to reality is that the unseen director of the *Hamlet* production apparently knows something about Shakespeare, and actually uses Elizabethan costumes, which I think must be against the rules of the Festival. In real life, the director would have hated *Hamlet* too, and would probably have done it as a nude production set on the moon.

Playwright Rudnick unfortunately does not develop his brilliant premise very well. The initial scene between Barrymore and Rally is very funny, with the young actor giving an example of how to make Hamlet's soliloquies more, you know—*real*. ("To be or not to be—that—that—*that* is the question! Whether 'tis nobler, huh, to um, like, suffer . . . ") After that, however, the play bogs down in a subplot

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about Rally's daffy girlfriend, a twenty-nine-year-old virgin whom he for some reason pursues without respite. There is also a scene with Rally's friend Lefkowitz, a film director who becomes the target of some very funny anti-Hollywood satire. But we never see Barrymore actually teaching the young man how to act Shakespeare; instead, we simply shift to a scene in which Rally has become convinced that Barrymore was correct, and then shift again to a final scene after the show has opened and Rally has flopped. We don't really know why he failed, whether he reverted to his naturalistic ways or simply lacked the skills to act in a heroic manner. Nor does Barrymore seem much concerned about his pupil's failure, though we would expect that he would have had a great emotional investment in the performance.

In sum, *I Hate Hamlet* has a sketchy, pared-down quality, as if half a dozen Broadway play doctors had taken their scalpels to it. The result is a case of Neil Simonitis, in which plot is sacrificed to verbal jokes; there seems to be a vague fear that if a play ceases to be funny, even for an instant, the audience will yawn, the critics will jeer, and the show will close in Philadelphia. It is rare that I complain that a play is too short, but *I Hate Hamlet* needs more development of its themes, plus a resolution that makes sense, and gives us some insight about the art of acting.

Nicol Williamson's bravura performance as Barrymore was worth flying in to see. Williamson is a noted English actor who has played Hamlet himself, in a version that was filmed in the seventies and can now be found in some video stores. As Hamlet, Williamson gave a subdued but intelligent performance; as Barrymore, however, he was wonderfully outrageous, strutting, preening, and convincingly roaring out lines like "I do not overact, I simply possess the emotional resources of ten men!" Williamson even managed to look like Barrymore, although I never noticed any resemblance previously. John Barrymore was the last in a line of great American Shakespearean actors—Edwin Forrest, Junius Brutus Booth, Edwin Booth (Junius Brutus' son), and John Drew (Barrymore's uncle). It says a lot about the state of American acting today when we have to import an English actor to play a great American one. If only we really could bring Barrymore back from the dead!

Evan Handler was adequate as the young actor. Handler is small and bland, with a tendency to underplay, which are of course appropriate characteristics for the role, but he failed to demonstrate other typical vices of the contemporary American actor—the self-centeredness, the obsession with raw emotion, the dazed introspection. Part of his problem, however, arose from the script, which never shows him actually performing after his initial, ridiculous "To be or not to be." Jane Adams was charmingly dizzy as the girlfriend, while Adam Arkin gave a deft performance as the show biz cynic, Lefkowitz. Celeste Holm, an actress whom I have long loved, was disappointing in the role of Rally's agent; in poor voice, she alone in the cast

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needed to be miked, which made her seem like a plastic flower in the midst of a real bouquet. (She certainly wasn't miked back when she sang "I'm Just a Girl Who Can't Say No" in the original *Oklahoma!*) Her timing seemed to be off as well, so that some funny lines, like "It is Shakespeare in the Park; it is nonprofit; I will make them bleed," failed to get laughs.

The night after I saw *I Hate Hamlet*, Evan Handler walked off the set and out of the play during the first act, never to return. He and Williamson had apparently been feuding throughout the rehearsal period. During the performance in question, Williamson, who has a reputation as an erratic actor, slapped Handler on the buttocks with the flat of his sword during the Errol-Flynn-style duel that ends the act. The incident was so bizarre, and so reflective of the relationship between the characters they were portraying, that the whole thing may have been a publicity stunt. If so, it certainly succeeded, because it put the show on the front page of all the New York papers. I would not want to condone Williamson's capriciousness (although he is nowhere near as capricious as Barrymore was himself), but, as Lincoln is supposed to have said about Grant's drinking, if that is what it takes to perform so magnificently, tell me his brand so that I can recommend it to our American actors, including the indignant Evan Handler.

If any Sam Shepard enthusiasts can explain to me what they see in his plays, I hope they will let me know. He seems to have a following among intellectuals, but whenever I ask friends or colleagues what they could possibly like about him, they seem embarrassed and speechless, as if they had been asked to explain the beauty of a rainbow to a blind man. Some critics have written vaguely about his supposed wonderful gift with language, to which I scornfully reply, "When was the last time you heard anyone *quote* a Sam Shepard play?" Just contrast the dialogue of Harold Pinter, who also starts with ordinary, meandering speech, but turns it into something resonant and menacing, with the flat, fatiguing, foolish, flatulent, forgettable lines of any Sam Shepard play of your choice. His plays are plotless, humorless, sexless, witless, pretentious, long-winded bores. (Aside from that, they are wonderful.)

The only value I can see in Shepard's work is a feeling for American archetypal characters—the cowboy, the fanatical military officer, the rock star, the Hollywood producer, the millionaire. These, along with their bleak urban/Western settings, give the plays a certain mythic resonance, but since the action is so fitful and the characters remain so underdeveloped, the atmosphere soon palls. You get an eerie feeling for the first thirty seconds, followed by endless tedium.

Shepard's latest offering, *States of Shock*, which had a limited run at the American Place Theatre in late spring, is set in a cafe somewhere in the West. The cafe locale is itself an American archetype that

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playwrights, novelists, and screenwriters have mined for years, since it provides for interesting confrontations among traveling strangers, who in turn symbolize the restlessness that is so typical of American society. Into Shepard's cafe wanders an outlandish former colonel pushing a disabled veteran in a wheelchair. It seems that the vet, who is named Stubbs, was injured in a nameless foreign war that sounds like Viet Nam, where a 90 millimeter shell passed straight through his body and killed the colonel's son. Stubbs now has a scar the size of a grapefruit in the middle of his chest as evidence of this amazing event, which the colonel wants to re-enact with war toys on a cafe table.

Stubbs, rendered speechless by his wound, can only communicate by a whistle around his neck—until suddenly he starts speaking, and turns out to be just as long-winded as everybody else. A middle-aged tourist couple at another table await an order of clam chowder. A slow, inept waitress named Glory Bee carries food around with a mincing walk like that of a Japanese geisha. The colonel balances a cup of coffee on his head. While awaiting his chowder, the male tourist starts masturbating. (I guess this is Shepard's idea of the erotic.) The colonel whips Stubbs. The colonel dances with Glory Bee. Stubbs, who apparently is the colonel's son himself, leaves the wheelchair and the colonel gets in it. A tray table full of gas masks rolls onstage. This thrilling series of events is punctuated by a lot of offstage noise; apparently the war has arrived at the cafe, killing the manager and wounding the cook. In murky light, Stubbs, wearing a gas mask, is triumphant over his father. The play ends, and a man behind me starts booing loudly, the first time I have heard a boo in a theatre in many years. I'm with you, pal, I think to myself grimly, but as a theatre critic I can save my jeers for my review.

Bill Hart directed the play ponderously. The action was slow (or did it just seem like it?), with every line played dead seriously, and there were any number of heavy effects, like an endless light show with live percussion at the beginning of the play, or the colonel's ridiculous costume (designed by Gabriel Berry), a mixture of American army, French legionnaire, and doorman uniforms plus a cavalry officer's sword.

Isa Thomas and Steve Nelson were appropriately bland as the tourists, while Erica Gimpel, like everybody else in the cast, was totally unfunny as the waitress. Michael Wincott has a wonderfully modulated voice, which made him almost bearable as Stubbs. The electric John Malkovich turned the hapless role of the colonel into a tour de force. With his huge, strong gestures, and his resonant, penetrating Midwestern voice, he radiated energy like a nuclear reactor gone critical. He found variety in the role where there was none in the script, and breathed life into the endlessly vapid lines. What a waste of a fine actor! If there is an off-Broadway award for making bricks without straw, he certainly deserves to win.

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I Hate Hamlet may have been the funniest play on Broadway, but the funniest *show* of the season was Jackie Mason's *Jackie Mason Brand New*. I missed his initial Broadway show (for which I could now kick myself) out of a usually-unerring prejudice against one-person shows, and only got to this one after it had been running many months. "Surely he can't just stand up there by himself and tell jokes for two hours," I said to my companion as we entered the theatre. Well, yes, he does. He writes every word himself, and updates his jokes constantly. Drawing on a rich Jewish comic tradition, he works the audience beautifully, and never ceases to be funny for a moment. The thrust of his humor, like most Jewish humor, is the deflation of pretentiousness. This leads to a lot of good political satire, with material taken straight from the front pages (Teddy Kennedy got a good working over), but Mason managed to cover everything from our sexual foibles to our eating habits. After his comments on sushi—"invented by a couple of Jewish guys who wanted to start a restaurant without having to have a kitchen"—I'll never be able to pass a Japanese restaurant again without laughing. May he return to Broadway again and again!

ACADEMIC CAPITALISM & LITERARY VALUE

Harold Fromm

Confronting some of the most heated issues in the literary academy, Harold Fromm charges that the critical practices dominating the liberal arts in recent years have subordinated literature to unethical ends. In the hands of some feminists, Marxists, new historicists, and others, he says, literature has become a commodity over which self-aggrandizing interests are struggling for control. Beneath an aura of revolutionary virtue, Fromm contends, these critics are as entrepreneurial and politically self-centered as the capitalistic and patriarchal systems they denounce.

"Anyone who cares about the fate of literature in this age of academic theory-mongering will be grateful for [Fromm's] sensitive and humane analysis."—Roger Kimball

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JOHN LOUGHERY

Diminishing Returns: Malevich to Salle

THE STORY OF ABSTRACT ART in the twentieth century has something in it for everyone. For the true believer, the non-representational painters were authentic visionaries, initially misunderstood, whose triumph is evident in the legacy of Kandinsky, Delaunay, Miro, Mondrian, and the New York School. For the skeptics, the dramatic decline in the quality of abstraction between 1960 and 1990 only confirms their suspicion that the whole thing was overwrought and over-publicized to begin with, a detour (worthy or confused) from the more vital traditions of painting. And for the politically minded, the current muddle verifies the thesis that changes in styles of art are not so much virgin births as cultural constructs, answering certain market or class needs at a given moment, a moment which in the case of abstract art is no longer with us.

Into this broil comes the 1991 scholarly examination of the Russian Suprematist movement, and the timing couldn't be better. The opportunity to study the ambitions and achievements of Kazimir Malevich at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and of Liubov Popova at the Museum of Modern Art leads us back to the heady days of the emergence of abstract art as a great cause in Western culture. Like their contemporaries Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko, Malevich and Popova were artists of large aspirations, great independence of mind, and some understandable naïveté about the kind of social upheavals they were witnessing in the aftermath of the Bolshevik takeover.

Suprematism was an intellectual quest, a romantic and Promethean effort to shake loose "the ballast of the external world," as Malevich once put it, thereby freeing man to contemplate the supremacy of the Ideal. Perception and purity—essences—were all-important; representation, subjectivities, surfaces, and ambiguities were seen as part of a dying social and intellectual order. So what was more plausible for Russian painters at work in the years just prior to and then following the October Revolution than to assume that politics and art were meeting at the ultimate crossroads of history, at the dawn of a striving new era? Abstract art, it seemed (especially given the new government's initial interest), would answer the deepest needs of the age. That Popova died (in 1924) before seeing her work repudiated by her

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country was probably lucky for her; that Malevich lived to be told that his daring aesthetic principles had no place in the Soviet state, that his geometric abstraction had to give way to a healthier, more politically useful realism, was more than a personal tragedy. Rather, this development abruptly ended a chapter in the history of the consciousness of art in the twentieth century.

The road to the famous Suprematist paintings of squares or black circles or red crosses floating in a sheer white space, or to Popova's busier but equally abstract "painterly architectonics," was through Cubism, of course, as much as it was by way of any hoped-for political freedoms. At the Metropolitan Museum, the thrill was in watching Malevich's completely unpredictable evolution from the perfunctory Impressionism of *On the Boulevard* (1903) to the intense gouache self-portraits of 1908 to a quasi-primitive, very Slavic expressionism of 1911–1912. And then the first leap, in 1912, as the peasant woodcutters and water-carriers become dymanic shapes rather than social types. *Knife Grinder/Principle of Flickering* (1913) is surely one of the great examples of Cubism striving to be more than an art of modern still life, though Malevich's violins, lamps, and vanity cases are every bit as well executed in this style. (The wonder is how an artist who didn't travel outside his country until 1927 had such a full grasp of the structural rethinking that Cézanne, Picasso, and Braque had set in motion.) A second and *still* greater leap was to be savored in the paintings that followed these, beginning only two years later. In *Eight Red Rectangles* or *White Square on White* and MoMA's well-known *Painterly Realism*, we watch art being made into something that severs more ties and makes more demands than anyone would have thought possible at that time. These spare, glowing works are both earnest and ecstatic and, regardless of whether or not one feels the visionary intent, they make Malevich's forced retreat into representational art in the late twenties seem an intolerable brutality. The last gallery at the Met contained plenty of examples of this eccentric period, some of which have their appeal (by this point in his life, Malevich was a first-rank colorist) and some of which (e.g., a self-portrait of 1933 done in the style of Cranach or Holbein) are downright dopey and sarcastic. What a sorry end to a brilliant, original career!

The Popova exhibition at the Modern seemed in every way a more minor show than the Malevich, though much of that could have been an unfair function of size. The artist died young, at the age of thirty-five, and so there aren't many Popovas around. Nor were her early works, or what we saw at MoMA, particularly memorable: the Cubist paintings are oppressively dark and manically busy. The "painterly architectonics," though, are another matter. These oils and watercolors, while never as austere as Malevich's, create an abstract drama-of-sorts in their own right. They involve more shapes which not only touch but crowd each other, overlap, and intersect. They don't float in a spatial infinity like Malevich's more spiritual or

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cerebral forms, but project a sweatier, heavier physicality. Still, for Popova (never technically a Suprematist) as much as for her elder and mentor in the Russian avant-garde, connections to observable realities and emotional states have been definitively broken.

Kazimir Malevich and Liubov Popova created a body of work that is visually and philosophically compelling—seeing both exhibitions in the same month made that clear—but there's a problem in a contemporary experience of this work that isn't entirely unrelated to Malevich's fate at the hands of the commissars. In their doctrines and their aura, these painters, like many of their contemporaries, placed on art a vast redemptive burden that it can't sustain; for all their self-assurance, there is something tenuous and troubled (or so it feels today), a spirit that is arid and even a little frightening, behind the major paintings. For an aesthete of the last fin de siècle, the raison d'être of life was embodied in a Whistler nocturne, a Tiffany window, a William Morris design. Twenty years later, these delicacies had been sneeringly replaced by the rigors of geometric forms and the purifying dogma of abstraction. Yet how great is the difference between the two groups? The search for artistic absolutes and "saving" ideas, rigid aesthetic solutions to the chaos of modern life, leads to the same fascinating, well-meaning, inevitable dead end.

With a few notable exceptions, American artists came late to abstract painting; neither its urgency nor its principles made much of a dent on the national consciousness until the late thirties. Rather—and plausibly—coming to terms with the natural world, from the rocky New England coast to the peaks of Colorado, was a subject of greater concern in this country. The Albert Bierstadt retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum and two traveling shows of Winslow Homer's late works, which I caught up with in Washington, D.C. this spring, illustrated how complicated, almost murky, an area this could be.

The Bierstadt show was lavish, even formidable. It seemed to me well presented and (oddly, given my reaction) worth doing. Yet, despite the presence of some credible, light-filled pictures like *Seal Rock, California*, the haunting *Wreck of the "Ancon,"* and several inspiring outdoor oil sketches, how little this exhibition had to do with great painting and how little it had to do with a personal, intensely felt experience of nature. The decade just past afforded anyone interested in the subject a golden opportunity to evaluate those nineteenth-century landscape artists consigned to museum basements in more doctrinaire days—and in these revisionist shows Luminists like John Kensett and Fitz Hugh Lane, among others, emerged from the shadows triumphantly. But the creator of those detailed, crowd-pleasing vistas *Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie* and *Cho-looke, The Yosemite Fall*, wasn't a man with a feel for landscape art as an essentially poetic and philosophical medium, on the order of Kensett and Lane (who rigorously avoided anything too journalistic or theat-

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rical). He was a tourist, albeit a sensitive one, in search of the right material: cliffs and tepees. What we are inevitably left with, then, is by and large of documentary, historical, or narrative interest, a chance to be transported back to the 1860s.

Now, pictorial art as historical chronicle or storytelling isn't a negligible thing—never mind what hardcore Modernism taught us—nor is it such a big deal that Bierstadt probably worked with his Eastern audience's tastes foremost in his mind a good deal of the time. But to pass from Bierstadt's sometimes formulaic postcard depictions of the American West to an immersion in the best of Winslow Homer's oils is to know immediately the difference between craft and art, or between talent never fully realized and genius purely focused. The show of Winslow Homer's Prout's Neck works at the National Museum of American Art and the Corcoran Gallery exhibition entitled "Reckoning with Winslow Homer: His Late Paintings and Their Influence" overlapped (the marine works done in Prout's Neck, Maine between 1890 and 1910 *are* Homer's late paintings), yet happily entertained different purposes. The former celebrated the culmination of a magisterial career, while the latter attempted to define Homer in a wider context and included many paintings by artists allegedly influenced by Homer's style, subject matter, or quietly robust approach to art.

Like Monet's haystacks and Mondrian's flowers, Homer's crags and breakers, his mist-shrouded skies and storm-blasted shorelines, are both expert renderings of observed sites and phenomena and reflections of something more—without, it is important to insist, ever ceasing to be that special, hard, material thing that they are, without ever lapsing into a pallid or academic symbolism. And that "something more" is not solely aesthetic, but contemplative and even moral. This extra dimension eluded too many of the Hudson River School group, I think, who lacked Homer's brooding focus and intensity. When we look long enough at *Driftwood*, in which a lone figure in an oil slicker sits on a log and stares at the turmoil of the water, and even more so when we linger over those oils like *Cannon Rock* or *Moonlight, Wood's Island Light* that exclude all people but imply our own observation of the scene (always, it feels, a variation on the same scene), we stumble upon Homer's importance, never greater than today—his insistence that we understand that the rhythms of the world have to come before the needs of the human ego, that for us to persist, to observe, and to see, all the while effacing ourselves, is what matters. In the best of the many fine paintings in the two Washington shows, we are made aware of one nineteenth-century American artist who can convey a love of paint, color, and form for its own sake, a deeper love for these elements as they merge with the object of his meditation, and a reverence for the mysteries of his subject, that particular unsparing northerly coastal terrain.

Curator Bruce Robertson's catalogue essay for the Corcoran show

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is a first-rate appreciation of several aspects of the enigmatic Homer and his era,[1] but this business of "reckoning" with his influence is tricky. In his foreword, Robertson notes that Homer played a pivotal role in American art akin to Cézanne's in France. Alas, that idea wasn't borne out by what was on the walls of the Corcoran. With John Marin, yes, the point holds. And in a way with Marsden Hartley—though both, it could be argued, were more in love with their painting than their subject. But the connection doesn't take with most of the others. George Bellows, well represented in the show, used a paintbrush and selected his colors with an athletic vigor unusual for his time but quickly moved toward landscapes that are often busily peopled and fringed with urban elements—buildings, bridges, roads, walkways to the Hudson River. The little-known Van Dearing Perrine, painter of wintry Palisades views, approximated Homer's purely outdoor robustness, yet his color range is narrower, darker, more relentlessly somber. The pictures of Rockwell Kent, Robert Henri, Leon Kroll, Edward Hopper, and the rest seem stiff, earnest, subdued, and predictable compared to the agitated glory of *Northeaster* or *Early Morning After a Storm*. These men, at least in these examples, are too purely "landscape artists," good folks just having a great time with a lot of paint. No, contrary to the subtext of the catalogue, the impression this engrossing exhibition left was that almost no one in American landscape art (in contrast to the Cézanne/French art story) even remotely approached the stature or insight of the Prout's Neck master. Winslow Homer's late paintings tell us, emphatically, that there isn't any reasonable substitute for the view of art as an arduous, slowly evolving endeavor, the product of day-to-day living with one's subject, removed from the art world, concern for one's audience, or the shoals of careerism.

Another excellent exhibition of a somewhat different stripe at the Corcoran this year, running concurrently with the Homer, was the Tony Cragg retrospective. A British artist who has been increasingly prominent in group shows in the United States in the eighties, Cragg is as smart and natural a sculptor as you'll find at work today. He has the élan of an early Modernist, he gravitates toward the rough castoff materials of a blue-collar Conceptualist, and he deals in subjects and moods that are timely and powerfully suggestive.

Trained as a scientist, living now in the industrial Ruhr district of Germany, and never particularly interested in public exhibition or even the designation "artist," Cragg is fascinated by plastic bottles, tires, and other urban junk as much as he is by wood, stone, or metal. The constant in his very diverse creations seems to lie in just this feisty sense of his materials, which has nothing to do with the cool, ironic

[1] Bruce Robertson. RECKONING WITH WINSLOW HOMER: His Late Paintings and Their Influence. Cleveland Museum of Art & University of Indiana Press. $25.00.

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use of modern kitsch that Jeff Koons and the Neo-Geo crowd are involved with. For Cragg, there is nothing too mundane or culturally weighted as "valueless" that can't be turned to imaginative account by the right mind, eye, and hand. In *New Stones, Newton's Stones* and various wall pieces, found plastic fragments (broken or dirty combs, plates, frisbees, bottle parts) are arranged—in the former case, on the floor by subtle, breathtakingly beautiful gradations of the color spectrum, and in the latter case on the wall to form lively, often politically charged symbols and silhouettes. What to you or me would be a pile of junk becomes the means to images that are witty, provocative, and deftly made. *Minister* uses tires and rusted, clunky, circular machine parts to assemble a series of daunting, elegant spires several feet high. *Inverted Sugar Crop* was one of the most alluring and disturbing works at the Corcoran and suggests that Cragg has a somber as well as a playful side. Against a floor and a wall of wedged planks of rusting steel, what look to be thirty skulls from the killing fields are thrown together, though on closer inspection we see that these round forms are sugar beets in bronze. Rubbish and refinement, nature and culture: this is a potent, un-slick, hands-on art of dichotomies that give way to an underlying unity. What we have in Tony Cragg is the spirit of Walt Whitman, wise rather than clever (despite appearances), funky, exuberant, and urgently communicative.

Photo-Realism, never much appreciated by art critics and often dismissed as too much in the "Now, how did he do that?" vein of picture-making, has been around for twenty years. As a recent show at the Nassau County Museum of Art in Roslyn Harbor, New York made clear, it's a movement that is still going strong. I doubt that these painters are ever going to enjoy a wider, more appreciative critical consensus (they're too far removed from the theoretical values modern art criticism thrives on), yet for this viewer "In Sharp Focus: Super-Realism Today" did a fair job of suggesting that such blanket condescension is off the mark. In quantity, which the Nassau County Museum exhibition provided, the Photo-Realists look more interesting and varied than they do when seen in smaller numbers.

Don Eddy's overloaded glass shelves, Charles Bell's gumball machines, Duane Hanson's life-size effigies, and Richard Estes' oppressively detailed urban panoramas have never been among the works of modern art I find most stirring, yet in a wider context—a context that included some lesser-known artists and art works—they made more sense. Ralph Goings' still lifes of coffee-shop condiments, like Idelle Weber's picnic litter and Davis Cone's decaying movie houses, hold their own with the best of Robert Cottingham, Tom Blackwell, and Chuck Close. Their point, if they must have one, might not be so very different from that of the Pop Artists. The last shreds of the old-time division between highbrow and lowbrow taste, or spirituality and object-fetishism, are gone. This is how we live in the second half of the

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twentieth century, Robert Bechtle's affectless suburban car-owners and Blackwell's pedestrians suggest; this is what we create and value and, for better or worse, what we are. Art as inspiration or moral guide or meditation on the Ideal is a dead proposition.

Across Long Island Sound in Connecticut, at the New Britain Museum of American Art, a survey of contemporary abstract landscapes brought together Joan Nelson, Ellen Phelan, Guy Godwin, and Gregory Crane, all New York painters of exceptional ability who operate in that tricky territory in which representation of the natural world is subordinated to painterly effect but—in sharp contrast to the Malevich-Popova ideal—nature is acknowledged as the source of the artists' ideas, color, energy, and play of light and dark. Like the Photo-Realists, these artists operate in a vehemently anti-romantic vein. Joan Nelson's small, achingly somber pictures continue to be among the most effective evocations of the diminishment of nature in our time. For Nelson questions both the reality of landscape in our lives and our obsession with old pictures and great art, those sources that exist to remind us of a bygone age of nature-worship. Each of her paintings is made up of delicate fragments (tree limbs, bits of cloud, a bush or a hill) borrowed—copied—from the oils of past masters like Altdorfer, Zurbaran, or Ruisdael and is then made to look as time-worn and precious, as scored and marked, as possible. The grand vista as a whole no longer exists, but the artist provides us with a memory, a token, a neatly packaged bit of anguish with a beautiful encaustic glaze. The New Britain show included one of her best, but it's typical of Joan Nelson (and appropriate to her theme) that the painting can't be discussed secondhand without an illustration as all of her paintings lack titles—just as they lack abundant scenery and enough particularizing incident to distinguish them, in the telling, from any other Nelson painting. For Nelson, painting today is a matter of vestiges, not dynamic breakthroughs.

Finally, from the proverbially sublime to the ridiculous, the six new paintings by art-star David Salle at the Gagosian Gallery in New York (Mr. Salle has abandoned Mary Boone for an equally posh uptown home) were a different order of experience entirely. These large pictures are pretty much the same old story, or litany, but executed now with a more muted range of colors. Rather like an amateur artist's sketchpad, Salle's canvases continue to offer a barrage of overlapping images—Renaissance figures, African carvings, cartoon bubbles, quasi-pornographic replications (women with their legs spread), all manner of doodles and fragments—badly drawn, indifferently painted, presented as if (and here's the Big Idea) all images are equal in worth and meaning in our brave new world of slick reproduction and video bombardment or, on the other hand, can be seen as equally devalued. The new works, touted by Roberta Smith in the *New York Times* as paintings that, "despite their extreme artifices, . . . are generated by a love of looking, an affection for other art, and

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a basic generosity,"[2] seemed to me anything but the smarmy things Smith was describing. In fact, it's hard for me to believe that we looked at the same six paintings. David Salle wants to be nasty and numbing, to the limited extent that his work aims to effect any mood or response at all, and he has made a fantastic career out of implying that interesting draftsmanship, narrative, abstraction, personality, coherence, style, nuance, originality, quality judgments, and meaning are outmoded values. His energetic concoctions imply that such notions are, at best, quaint. Silence might be the proper response to such a drastic loss of faith, but only an innocent would wait upon that development in 1991. Cynicism is "in." The audience for meaninglessness is red-hot. French texts in hand, this group is ready to cheer its anti-heroes all the way to the bank. And in today's art world, you can't do much better than the Gagosian Gallery on Madison Avenue, a $40 illustrated exhibition catalogue that has no need for critical essays, and a guaranteed slot in the Whitney Biennial. Seize the day, Mr. Salle. It can't last.

[2] Roberta Smith, "David Salle Enters a Rococo Phase," *The New York Times*, May 5, 1991, p. C26.

On March 1st, 1991 at the Nicholas Roerich Museum, Miller Williams accepted The Poets' Prize Committee's $3,000.00 award for the best book of verse published in America in 1989. LIVING ON THE SURFACE was published by Louisiana State University Press.

Honorable Mentions included TRANSPARENT GESTURES by Rodney Jones, and GOD HUNGER by Michael Ryan. The next award will be given for the best book of verse published in 1990.

The Poets' Prize Committee

Dick Allen, Hayden Carruth, Toi Derricotte, Lynn Emanuel, Dana Gioia, Emily Grosholz, Andrew Hudgins, T. R. Hummer, Colette Inez, Mark Jarman, Beth Joselow, Ted Kooser, Margaret Lally, Denise Levertov, Thomas P. Lynch, Robert McDowell, Frederick Morgan, Julia Randall, Louis Simpson, Henry Taylor, Michael Waters.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

LIKE MANY FOR WHOM CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MUSIC is the object of continuous fascination, I am an admirer of the American Composers Orchestra. For starters, there is its undeniable instinct for survival and growth. With a decade and a half behind it—years abundant with other good ideas for the performance and promotion of contemporary music that sank with hardly a trace—the ACO strode into its fifteenth season last fall with a series of four concerts in Carnegie Hall. And, though its programming has always leaned toward the new, it has brought audiences a vivid retrospective of American orchestral music, reaching back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for scores by Loeffler, Herbert, Griffes, Sousa and Joplin, and stopping on the way to the present to sample Converse, Carpenter, Copland, Barber, Harris, Ellington, Krenek, Weill, Wolpe, Thomson, Ives, Antheil, Sessions, Riegger and Carter—among others. An important part of its activity has always been commissions, and it has played 58 of them to date. Furthermore, its launching spirits, the composers Francis Thorne and Nicolas Roussakis and the conductors Dennis Russell Davies and Paul Lustig Dunkel, are still its guiding spirits, and, since they have proven adept at navigating the funding seas even at their most storm-tossed, the ACO promises to be doing its missionary work for some time to come. Most important, its performances have never been less than accomplished and professional, and often have risen to the really inspired—from a group that plays together as little as three or four times a year.

All of that said, I regret to report that the season just past was a disappointment. Statistically—and I do not mean to imply a value judgment—the focus of the programs represented an apparent further tilt toward the present. On the four Sunday afternoons were six world premieres of ACO commissions, six New York premieres of works written in the past decade, and three others—one composed in 1984, one in 1979 and one (Samuel Barber's First Symphony) in 1936. Though I have not attempted to document this assertion, I would hazard a guess that no ACO season has concentrated more unequivocally on very recent works.

At least the programs mirrored current trends. If one overriding conclusion were to be drawn, it would be that eclecticism rules. Take the start and finish of the first afternoon. It began with *Preambulo* by Roberto Sierra (1953–), a study for large orchestra that belongs

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squarely to the postserial genre of juxtapositions of fragmented timbres, sonorities and rhythmic cells, slightly leavened in this case by a Hispanic yeast (Sierra is Puerto Rican). Debussy's *Jeux* was the acknowledged great-granddaddy, with the tonal skeleton yanked out and not much Gallic lightness of touch. The afternoon ended with William Bolcom's Fifth Symphony, a largely tonal work by turns big, brawny, loud, populist, exploitative, sardonic and unabashedly derivative, one that goes so far in its eagerness to purge "academic prissiness" (Bernard Jacobson's program-note phrase) as to combine quotations from *Abide with Me* and the Wedding March from *Lohengrin* in counterpoint in its *Scherzo Mortale*. Poles apart, you say? The season had barely begun.

The next program in the series was even more oddly assorted. It opened with an ACO commission called *Bonehead*, by David Lang (1957–), described by the composer as "what would result from giving musical instruments to cavemen. . . . . (T)he sounds these players would want to make might be quite unlike the usual orchestral noises. Bonehead music would describe a world without the influences that surround Western music." But, however lively Lang's conceptual imagination, the outcome was virtually interchangeable with the offerings on any number of contemporary-music programs: a span of ten minutes or so of repeated and contrasted orchestral figurations, moving within a narrow intervallic compass, with little or no immediately apprehensible principle of musical organization or progress, and capped by a noisy ending.

After that came the New York premiere of Lester Trimble's Third Symphony, written for the Albany Symphony and given its first performance in September 1986 shortly before the composer's death. A graceful, adept and somewhat too benign work, it sprang unapologetically from the Western tonal-symphonic tradition, rooted in the soil tilled more memorably by Shostakovich, Janáček and Sibelius. After intermission the stage filled for the world premiere of *African Portraits* by Hannibal Peterson (1948–). This "multi-cultural, multilingual" composition, commissioned jointly by the Baltimore Symphony and the ACO, was in "two acts" (*The Drum and the Cross* and *The Land of Milk and Honey*), and called on the services of a blues singer, a gospel singer, a *griot* (narrator) playing a *kora* (a 21-string plucked harp-lute), five African percussionists called the Drumsong Society, the Hannibal Peterson Jazz Quintet, the Morgan State University Chorus, soloists and a large orchestra with three more percussionists exercising a large and varied battery—and a "theatrical advisor." In the program notes Peterson lays the origins of the work to "the spirit of the thing" he felt while jamming on trumpet with a tribal musician on a visit to Africa in the early seventies, and his quest "for an end to the barbaric atrocities committed against Africa and her children throughout the world." A libretto in English and Mandingo enclosed with the notes traces these atrocities from a raid by slave traders on a

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West African tribe through a slave auction on Wall Street and up to "Bensonhurst, New York, 1989." Along the way Peterson treats us to a dizzying variety of musical idioms and styles, closing with a sequence called "Redemption," in which the chorus sings of "love . . . the key to all mankind . . . Skyward it flies back home to God."

Against this the remaining programs by the ACO seemed almost staid. On the credit side I will mention only the fresh lyricism and adroitness of Barber's early symphony (he wrote it at age twenty-six), the Ives-without-the-sass plain speaking of two Otto Luening works, and the occasional elegance and too frequent slackness of Earle Kim's Violin Concerto, written in 1979 for Itzhak Perlman and played by him on this occasion. And I want to pay tribute once again to the orchestra's command of the manifold challenges of the various scores and the conducting skill of Davies and Dunkel. (David Zinman was the somewhat less effective conductor for the third afternoon.)

But there was a large debit side, at least to these ears. My musical maturation roughly spanned the postwar years in which serialism first increased its hold on American composition and then finally, after the symbolic "conversions" of Stravinsky and Copland, dominated it. Though I acknowledge the occasional triumph of musical talent over the serialist odds, I wish I could recover, for some productive endeavor like my vegetable garden, all of the hours I have spent in a plush seat squirming while modishly ugly, scholastic sounds came at me from a stage. The last decade or so has seen the gradual supersession of serialism and its legacy of acceptably eviscerated sounds and mandarin procedures in our concert halls, and I welcome this development. But much of what I heard on the ACO afternoons just recounted yielded slender grounds for optimism.

A case in point is Michael Torke's *Bronze*, an ACO commission for solo piano, strings, winds and brass, heard on the third program. The twenty-nine-year-old Torke, who was at the piano, is currently lionized in new-music circles. Zinman is quoted in the program notes as saying, "The sky's the limit as far as that kid's concerned . . . (H)e has the knack of writing terrific music with an incredibly popular touch. . . ." Torke has been the recipient of many commissions from orchestras and from Peter Martins' New York City Ballet, and the British record label Argo is said to have a series of compact discs of his music in the works. If what he has to say about *Bronze* is a fair sample, Torke's view of his own position in today's musical constellation is almost pugnacious. "The young people have had it with experimentation. . . . (T)here are musical devices that are less disposable than others, ways of combining notes that get better musical 'gas mileage,' certain languages that get you there without the stink of the composer's ego that says he has created some 'new form.' With my new belief that you can't will originality . . . I intend to explore ideas of classical voice leading, classical rhythms and classical functional harmonies. . . . I think it is absolutely cool to be a 'classical' composer."

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The upshot of this rhetoric in *Bronze* is an extended exercise on an arpeggio-like figure in the right hand. It takes a single rhythmic-melodic idea that could have come from a Rachmaninoff *étude-tableau* and runs it through sometimes barely perceptible, always thoroughly indistinguishable changes Terry-Riley-style while keeping it chained to an almost unvarying sequence of triadic harmonic shifts in the key of B-flat. Long before the piece even reached midpoint the conceit had worn out its welcome with me, and I detected a similar restlessness—and even incredulity—in the audience around me. I have heard only one other work by Torke, and although I was equally distressed by its poverty of invention, I would not judge his talent on so little evidence. But among the several scores by younger composers on this year's ACO programs, there was not much to encourage the notion that their vaunted liberation from yesterday's orthodoxies, their populist convictions and their back-to-basics fundamentalism are ushering in a more rewarding era in American composition.

Framed in these experiences, hearing Pierre Boulez and his crack Ensemble InterContemporain in a Carnegie Hall evening devoted to atonality early and late—Schoenberg, Webern, Berio, Ligeti and Boulez himself—was perhaps more palatable than it would otherwise have been. There could be no more persuasive exponents for the elusive and austere charms of this repertoire; in particular, Webern's spare Concerto Op. 24 for nine instruments and Boulez's own *Memoriale* (. . . *explosante-fixe* . . .) for flute, strings and horns were winning. Better still was the evening the Kronos Quartet gave over to the four string quartets of the living Russian composer Alfred Schnittke. Perhaps because I had previously been put off by the Kronos' self-conscious pop-cultism, this was my first hearing of the group in person, and I congratulate them on their enterprise in offering a half-filled Alice Tully Hall a program of the music of a single composer little known outside the Soviet Union and the most rarefied Western musical circles. Happily, Schnittke's compositional gifts turned out to be sufficient to sustain interest. To a grounding in Viennese atonality Schnittke adds a contrapuntal richness and often a kind of sprung and implied quasi-tonal progress. The instrumental language utilizes themes that are passed back and forth, glissandos, trills, pizzicatos, ostinatos, chordal passages and so forth; there were none of the off-string sounds so beloved of our own postwar avant-garde. Only in the Third Quartet (1983) did Schnittke succumb to fashion and indulge in the "found-object" borrowing from others, in this case motifs from Orlando di Lasso, Beethoven and Shostakovich. For the most part, however, these works had a convincing stylistic unity and an aural intelligibility. So the music did not need the help of the stage lighting, a succession of red, blue, gold and white floodlights focussed on the organ pipes behind the performers, changing as if to underline each structural pivot. Schnittke should

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have been allowed to speak for himself. Neither did the music need the amplification provided by the speakers visible on stage. Though there were a few ragged attacks, and I sometimes felt the first violin was too reticent, the Kronos rendered these works skillfully and expressively.

When the Vienna Philharmonic appeared under Lorin Maazel in a concert performance of Strauss's *Elektra* at Carnegie Hall early in March, staging was again an issue. The performance, with Eva Marton in the title role, was being videotaped, and for the occasion a platform was constructed at the back of the stage for the singers, elevating them above the orchestra. Each of them stood at a music stand decorated to resemble a Hellenic column, with Marton out front, and as the drama proceeded spotlights played on the participants. Perhaps this was intended to improve on the usual static concert-opera expedient of arraying the singers in a rank to the left and right of the conductor. But it was sometimes more distracting: when, for example, Marton wanted to react to her mother Klytämnestra's importunings, she had to swivel around awkwardly.

Musically the reading was wholly satisfying. The orchestra's playing alone would have amply justified the stiff ticket prices (top was $125), and it reminded one again that, whatever was gained or lost acoustically when the hall was renovated in the eighties, an orchestra can still sound gloriously rich, full, balanced and penetrating here—it depends on the orchestra. Maazel's tempos were well judged, and he seemed in admirable unanimity with the singers. Marton could hardly be better suited to a role than she is to Elektra. Her tone, steadier now in the midrange than when I last heard her, is robust and laced with sufficient high partials to meet the role's basic requirement of staying afloat on the orchestral torrents. But more than that, she shaped her soliloquies with musical insight, got a sarcastic edge into her early exchanges with Klytämnestra, some desperation into her scene with Chrysothemis, and an ominous mordancy into her offer to light Aegisth's way to the palace door, where Orest awaits him. Among the other singers, Elizabeth Connell's Chrysothemis stood out: her well produced tone soared over the orchestra as strongly as Marton's. The concert was preceded by a valuable innovation: a dramatic reading of the libretto in G.M. Holland and K. Chalmers' English translation of Hofmannsthal's German original.

The Metropolitan Opera's mounting of Leos Janáček's *Katya Kabanova* in the spring ranks with the finest things (*Lulu*, *La Clemenza di Tito*, the *Ring* cycle) it has done in a decade. Equivalent to its many musical excellences, supplied principally by the conductor Charles Mackerras, the Czech soprano Gabriela Beňačková in the title role, and the venerable Leonie Rysanek as her bullying mother-in-law, was the production, a collaboration of director Jonathan Miller and set

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and costume designer Robert Israel. Janáček's libretto for this tale of provincial hypocrisy, lust and suicide is based on *The Storm*, a play by the nineteenth-century Russian dramatist Alexander Ostrovsky set precisely in a small town called Kalinov on the Volga River. Though Miller and Israel studied old photographs of Russia as they worked, the production is sparing of local color, economically suggesting a generalized Slavic locale ("bleached and simplified," in Miller's phrase). The direction likewise cannily makes the most of the drama's tensions by permitting the music to reveal inner states without stagey italicizing. Miller's comments on this production to Bernard Holland of the *New York Times* ought to be required reading for aspiring operatic designers and directors. Asked if he—who has placed a *Rigoletto* in Little Italy—considered a similar approach to *Katya*, Miller replied, "I always have a coherent strategy, and I apply it to the opera in front of me. This particular one is set confidently in its own time. The temptation to move it to another one was very weak, since it is already so assured in the world it inhabits. Operas like this one or *The Marriage of Figaro* . . . discourage the kind of updatings that directors like Peter Sellars seem to take as a consistent approach. These are operas that invite you into their period . . . Many operas [like *Rigoletto*] wear fancy dress as a surface and have a structure below. In *Katya* and *Figaro* the surface and structure are bound together."

Sir Charles, a longtime champion and student of Janáček's operas whose edition was used for this *Katya*, was in musical charge, and the word that kept recurring to me as hé led the ensemble, from the hushed opening bars to the tumultuous climax, was "masterly." I confess to a bias: the sheer sound of this score is so beguiling to my aural sense—creates such a palpable feeling of physical delight—that it neutralizes my capacity to weigh and ponder. But my opinion of the performance's musical virtues was shared by practically everyone who saw it. Some claim that Mackerras' recorded versions of the Janáček operas in general lack the idiomatic tension that such conductors as Karel Ančerl and Vaclav Neumann bring to them. It could be. But it would take more bile than I possess not to be grateful for conducting as confident, musicianly and responsive to the singers as Mackerras'.

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BERT CARDULLO

The Wake of War

I SOMETIMES FEEL GUILTY for not reviewing Hollywood's latest releases—say, *Dances with Wolves*, *The Godfather: Part III*, *Wild at Heart* (a Hollywood film for all its *grand-guignol* trappings), and *The Silence of the Lambs*—since these are the films most people talk about. Indeed, the question usually put to me by friends and readers alike is, "Why *don't* you review these movies?" I respond by saying that the mass media cover such works in depth (if that is the phrase), so there's no need for me to add my two cents several months after the fact. But what I really mean is that, for the most part, Hollywood films don't need or invite criticism and analysis; what they want is *publicity*, and they get plenty of it. Of course there are exceptions, and those exceptions get the attention of every serious critic. They remain exceptions, however: works of compelling vision and imaginative execution in an art form that, more than any other, is controlled by the forces of the marketplace. Like it or not, and for a variety of reasons whose discussion is beyond the purview of this chronicle, most serious films (do I need to add that by "serious" I do not necessarily mean "unfunny"?) come from abroad—much trash is made abroad, too, but we don't need to import that since we make our own brand over here! And I number myself among those unfashionable critics who, in the words of Randall Jarrell, "exist simply to help [others] with [these] works of art," to enhance viewers' appreciation of their subtle motions and quiet meanings. Three recent films from abroad treat either the cruel aftermath of war or war's relationship (or lack thereof) to the civilian world surrounding it, and as a group they are noteworthy for eschewing the action of war itself, which is the subject—perhaps a better word would be object—of most war films, especially those made in America, where we have never had to deal with the (after)effects of a mechanized war fought on our own soil.

Life and Nothing But is Bertrand Tavernier's tenth feature film (his eleventh, *Daddy Nostalgia*, opened in New York in March 1991), with a screenplay by him and Jean Cosmos, and it shares both the virtues and the defects of his previous work: a glib dénouement, which you can find in *The Clockmaker* (1974) and *The Judge and the Assassin* (1976), although in these two films the glibness is exacerbated by political tendentiousness; the expert creation of mood or atmosphere, most apparent in *A Week's Vacation* (1980); ruminative music of the kind heard in *A Sunday in the Country* (1984) and subdued yet evocative

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color cinematography, supplied by Pierre William Glenn up to and including *Clean Slate* (1981) but by Bruno de Keyser after that; lengthiness and slow pace that at their worst, as in *Round Midnight* (1986), become ponderous, and at their best, as in *Life and Nothing But*, underline the film's subject. That subject is the horrendous aftermath of World War I,[1] during which parents and widows search for the remains of their loved ones amidst the ravaged, defoliated countryside of Verdun. It is 1920, and of France's 1.5 million war dead, 350,000 are still missing; a center has been set up for finding and identifying soldiers' bodies, and from this center families and lovers venture forth. Their searches will be lengthy, tedious, and even dangerous (many unexploded shells remain), and will frequently carry them far afield, where temporary barracks and dining facilities accommodate them; but search they will for anything—a scarf, a pipe, a locket—that positively identifies their man, even if no body remains.

In charge of the center for the location and identification of missing soldiers is Major Dellaplane, and the ghoulishness of his job has forced him to adopt a ghoulishly detached, even witty, attitude. After all, how can one remain sane and respond in any other way to the unparalleled suffering caused by so mindless a war? Or to the unparalleled idiocy of the French leadership,[2] which demands from this master identifier of dead bodies the production of a single "unknown soldier" for the victory parade up the Champs Elysées, and puts so much pressure on villages to erect monuments to their dead that representatives of one village that suffered no casualties wonder if Major Dellaplane might requisition two dead soldiers for them from a neighboring town? During his first meeting with Alice Vallier, a local schoolteacher who has lost her job to a returned soldier and now works as a waitress, the major urinates with his back to the camera as he advises her to give up the search for the body of her fiancé, Charles Féron, since that body may be disfigured if it is not in fact in pieces. The content of this little scene epitomizes Dellaplane's attitude toward his work; its form, a two-shot with no cutting, epitomizes Tavernier's own attitude toward his material: respectful, observant, "hushed," *humane*, with only as much camera movement as it takes to introduce or follow the action of a scene, and only as much cutting as it takes to reinforce its oppositions or sample its component parts. The muted colors of Bruno de Keyser's camera—mainly browns, blues, blacks, grays, and greens, usually photographed in early-morning or late-

[1] Tavernier's *Let Joy Reign Supreme* (1975) and *The Judge and the Assassin* are also explorations of the French past: the former film dramatizes the early eighteenth-century Regency of Philippe d'Orléans; the latter, anti-Dreyfusard feelings in the late nineteenth century through a child-murder case in a small town.

[2] For a film that depicts the corruption and incompetence of the French high command during World War I, see Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957), his best film (believe it or not) together with *Dr. Strangelove* (1963), a black comedy about America's launching of a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union.

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afternoon light—are naturally the perfect complement to Tavernier's directorial stance.

Alice Vallier is one of two major female characters in *Life and Nothing But*; the other is Irène de Courtil, a wealthy Parisienne who is searching for the body of her husband, François, who may have been killed by a bomb but whose father's munitions factory (which has been converted into a huge dormitory where Irène and Alice share a room) was left untouched by the Germans—presumably because they purchased some of their munitions from him. Irène and Alice become friends—the last time we see them they stroll arm-in-arm—united by their (unfulfilled) search among the dead if divided by social class; and also united by their search for the same man: François de Courtil changed his name to Charles Féron for his liaison with Alice Vallier. Major Dellaplane discovers this through his investigations but reveals it only to Irène, who doesn't care since she was less than in love with her husband, and since she has fallen in love with the major himself, who, despite being fifteen years her senior, has also fallen in love with her. Dellaplane cannot act on that love, however, partly because of his age, partly because his postwar duties have taken all the life and love out of him—though this aspect of his character, and of the film's theme, is slighted in favor of the relationship between Alice and Irène, which is not superfluous but is exaggerated by the merely sensational revelation that they shared the same man; and in favor of the relationship between Alice and a young artist, who would rather sculpt the life in her than memorialize the death of French soldiers, and who overcomes her resistance by the end of the film.

Tavernier thus shifts the focus of *Life and Nothing But* from the devastating effect of World War I not only on Dellaplane's psyche, but also *the world's*, to the contrivances of love, and he aggravates this shift by tacking on a sentimental postscript in which Dellaplane, two years after retiring to the country home of his youth, reads a love letter in voice-over to Irène, who is back in Paris but preparing to leave for the United States. Even the cinematography has changed as we see the major strolling hill and dale in an autumnal glow, with the camera out ahead of him panning and tracking the beautiful countryside. He expresses regret at not having acted on his feelings for Irène back in Verdun, but he derives consolation from the sheer fact of his love for her, which, even though it will remain unfulfilled, proves that he is still alive and fundamentally at peace with himself. So much for the horrors of war—for the especial horrors of World War I—and their effect on the expression of human emotion! In the space of a few minutes, Tavernier has nearly managed to subvert the substance of his film, despite Dellaplane's ironic comment in his letter that, had all the dead marched, the victory procession through the Arc de Triomphe would have taken eleven days instead of three hours. The point of *Life and Nothing But*, as conveyed by its very title, is that nothing but *life* remains in the wake of war, nothing but the will to

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stumble on, be it through bureaucratic instinct, cynical opportunism, humanitarian impulse, soldierly pride, or familial solidarity; romance only clouds the issue, since it is a kind of subject unto itself.

This film is a long sounding board against which the war resonates, not a staging ground for the conquest of love, and nowhere is this clearer than in the brilliant opening sequence, for which we are prepared by Oswald d'Andrea's pensive, haunting score heard over black-and-white titles. We see flashes of the ocean between titles, then two riders appear in the distance on a vast stretch of beach. As they approach the camera, we discover that one of them is a nun, the other a soldier. The soldier has been having trouble sitting up straight on his horse, and we learn why when he falls: he has only one leg. A limousine has been following and pulls up beside the horses in search of "military hospital #45"; the nun gives directions, the limousine takes off with Irène de Courtil seated alone in the back, and the narrative proper takes off with her. We never see the nun or the soldier again, yet they have introduced the theme of life-and-nothing-but and they have made possible the oblique entrance of a major character—that is, they have momentarily raised themselves to her level of importance and extended the imaginative reach of the film.

That reach is also extended by the film's central metaphor, the painfully slow excavation of a Red Cross train, filled with troops, from a tunnel in which it had hit a mine. Around this excavation, this combination "resurrection" of the dead—who have been perfectly preserved in clay, "fresh as corked wine"—and "disinterment" of the war from the darkness and dregs of its final station, springs up a lively encampment of relatives, soldiers, coolies, artists, and con men. Major Dellaplane has been pulled away from his headquarters to oversee operations, since all care must be taken not to disturb any of the other mines in the tunnel (several more explode nonetheless, killing additional soldiers). Appropriately, most of the film's (infrequent) hand-held shots occur during this anxious or anticipatory sequence, even as most of its overhead shots occur during scenes set in Dellaplane's regimented headquarters, where we look down on a cubicle-dominated, file-infested world. Dellaplane the man stands in direct contrast to such deadening regimentation, and Philippe Noiret's supreme achievement in this, his seventh role for Bertrand Tavernier,[3] is to balance the man's humanity against the major's efficiency, his melancholy against his grimness, his rage against his resignation. Understandably, it is out-of-doors, particularly at the chaotic excavation site—where he is away from the office, yet in quest of official order; on military business, yet at the service of Irène de Courtil—that the two sides of Dellaplane's character stand in greatest juxtaposition.

If *Life and Nothing But* is about the recovery of the dead, and the

[3] Noiret has previously acted in Tavernier's *The Clockmaker, Let Joy Reign Supreme, The Judge and the Assassin, Death Watch* (1979), *A Week's Vacation*, and *Clean Slate*.

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living, in the aftermath of war, Shohei Imamura's *Black Rain* (no relationship to Ridley Scott's abominable *Black Rain*, a "thriller" starring Michael Douglas and also set in Japan) is about the process of dying itself from the effects of war—in this case, from the radiation to which an aunt, an uncle, and their niece are exposed after the atomic-bomb explosion in Hiroshima. Imamura's film, adapted by him and Toshiro Ishido from the 1986 novel by Masuji Ibuse, certainly isn't the first to treat the devastation, psychological as well as physical, wrought by the bomb. Think only of Kaneto Shindo's *Children of Hiroshima* (1952), a semi-documentary that begins with an impressionistic montage of the dropping of the first atomic bomb, then follows a young schoolmistress around the stricken city seven years later; Hideo Sekigawa's *Hiroshima* (1953), a strongly anti-American re-enactment of the tragic bombing; and Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), a cinematically explorative study of the effect of the war—the war in Europe as well as over Japan—on the love affair of a French actress (who herself is in the process of making a fictionalized documentary about the bomb!) and a Japanese architect. But *Black Rain* is the most self-effacing of the Hiroshima films I have seen and therefore, paradoxically, the most powerful. That is, the film concentrates far more on character, family, and community than it does on politics, ethics, or its own form; the only editorializing comes toward the end, when the radio reports that the United States may use the A-bomb in North Korea and Mr. Shizuma, the uncle, responds, "Human beings learn nothing. They strangle themselves. Unjust peace is better than a war of justice." (But even this dollop of sanctimony is counterbalanced by the earlier remark of Mr. Aono, one of the niece's suitors, that the Korean War is good for his father's business.)

Imamura hasn't always gone so easy on Americans or his own countrymen: *Pigs and Battleships* (1961) blackly satirizes the American manipulation of Japanese culture since the Second World War, and *The Profound Desire of the Gods* (1968) deplores the coming of Western industrial development and religious practice to the Ryukyu Islands, supposedly the original homeland of the Japanese people; whereas *Endless Desire* (1958), *The Insect Woman* (1963), and *The Pornographer* (1966) treat the subjects of greed, crime, rape, incest, and murder in modern, urban Japan.[4] I prefer the kinder, gentler Imamura of *Black Rain* and of the earlier *Ballad of Narayama* (1983), which depicts an isolated, impoverished village in northern Japan where a seventy-year-old woman who can no longer do a full day's work observes a long tradition by abandoning herself to a snow-covered mountaintop rather than strain the limited resources of her son's family. *Black Rain*

[4] For a cinematically as well as sociologically expansive probe into the mind of a serial killer, skip the merely grisly *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (dir. by John McNaughton) and see Imamura's *Vengeance Is Mine* (1979).

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also takes place in a mountain village, but it is radiation sickness that sentences a person to death here, not old age, and it is the pervasiveness of this sickness that binds the sufferers together in mutual sacrifice and support.

The film opens about three minutes before the bomb falls on Hiroshima on the morning of August 6, 1945. We see the ocean and some of the life around it (a flamingo, a crab), a truck moving down the road, a group of people taking part in the tea ceremony, a man and a lone dog at a train station. Then the screen flashes to white—a flash that will figuratively recur several times during the film in the form of blinding sunlight—and the bomb explodes. Imamura's recreation of the ensuing horrors is nightmarishly convincing but mercifully brief (though there are two flashbacks to these scenes of death and destruction), for he concentrates on the lives of Yasuko (touchingly yet reticently played by Yoshiko Tanaka, whose authenticity in the role is matched by every other member of the cast), her uncle Shigematsu Shizuma, and his wife, Shigeko, five years after their escape from the inferno of Hiroshima. The twenty-five-year-old Yasuko is the ward of her aunt and uncle (Yasuko's mother—Shigematsu's sister—died soon after her daughter's birth, and we learn nothing of her natural father), and the three of them resettle in his mother's home in the village where he was born; "grandmother" is there, too, untouched by radiation and oblivious, in her senility, to all the suffering around her. As Yasuko's guardians, Shigematsu and Shigeko feel obligated to find her a husband before they die, even if that means selling the family land in order to provide their niece with a cash dowry. Although aunt and uncle know that they were exposed to radiation in Hiroshima, they persist in believing that Yasuko was not, because she was outside the city, vacationing by the Inland Sea. But on her way back to the city by boat, to find her aunt and uncle, Yasuko was spattered by "black rain"—a mixture of precipitation and radioactive ash that fell from the sky after the explosion of the bomb. So she, too, will eventually get radiation sickness, she seems to realize this, and the authorities confirm it because they refuse to issue her a health certificate. Without that certificate, she loses two suitors, one of whom she never even gets to meet (he had been negotiating terms through a marriage broker) and the other of whom, Mr. Aono, falls in love with her before learning of her contamination and choosing instead to marry a "cabaret hostess" from Fukuyama.

The only man who appears to suit Yasuko is the war veteran Yuichi, despite his being from a humble background and despite the fact that his combat experience has deranged him somewhat. Yuichi spends much of his time happily sculpting grotesque figures in stone, figures that smile at the same time as they estrange (and therefore can be viewed as symbols for his condition, for the human condition in the age of nuclear energy). But whenever he hears a truck or bus engine, he panics wildly in the belief that an American tank is approaching,

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and only Yasuko is able to calm him. In return, he comforts and assists her until she gets so sick that she must be hospitalized. Yasuko's aunt has been struck down before her by radiation sickness—indeed, Shigeko's illness seems to accelerate as a result of her own efforts to care for her niece—two of Uncle Shigematsu's friends recently died from it in the same month, and Shigematsu himself will be next. He's the last person we see in the film, and his last words express the hope that Yasuko will recover so that she can marry Yuichi. Then the camera cuts to a long shot of a beautiful, symmetrical landscape overlooked by a large mountain, and the screen goes to a nearly amorphous gray that slowly turns to white; concomitantly, Toru Takemitsu's previously ominous and insistent music-for-strings has become halting and plaintive.

We've seen several variations on this final nature-shot throughout the film, sometimes with a pan to the right over the landscape, sometimes with a tilt up to the mountain, and the effect, of course, is to magnify the horror of what is transpiring amidst such tranquil and harmonious surroundings. But Imamura was careful not to make the scenery look *too* beautiful, and to this end he had his cinematographer, Takashi Kawamata, shoot *Black Rain* in a black and white that is really a continuum of grays, of shades of gray that cast a kind of pall over the proceedings. The best word to describe Kawamata's camera-work is placid: it's as if the camera itself were, like nature, a silent and impassive observer. It tends to stay in the medium-to-full range indoors (where it often "sits" in the tatami position) and the full-to-long range outdoors; it travels selectively, functionally; and it likes to create tension and isolation *within* a shot—through interior frames, through vertical or diagonal lines—rather than manufacture them by juxtaposing shots, through cutting. In this way, the camera behaves more like a witness than a manipulator, more like a documentarian than a fabricator. And at documentary Imamura has had some practice: from 1970 to 1975 he made nothing but documentaries, both for television and for the screen.

Black Rain is not as long as *Life and Nothing But* (117 minutes compared to 134) but its pace is just as languorous, as *appropriately* languorous, as that of Tavernier's film. Essentially, Yasuko, her aunt, and her uncle are humanely waiting to die a horrible death, and what is important to this film is the wait more than the death, the humanity more than the horror: the tending to rice paddies, the raising (and catching) of carp, the taking of meals, the setting of clocks, the comings and goings by train, by foot, by bus, by boat. There are funerals during the film, but they are testaments less to human perishability than to human will—the will of those who remain to live, to survive, another day. Conversely, there are comic moments in *Black Rain*, but they are themselves either instances of the grotesque—Yasuko's leaping on top of Yuichi, for example, in order to keep him from entering the road and being run down by a truck—or are

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juxtaposed against moments of gravity in order to create the effect of grotesqueness, as when a silly romantic quarrel between a middle-aged couple is interrupted by the vomiting of a man suffering from radiation sickness. In other words, the comic and the serious attitudes seem about equally mixed in both cases, and the result is that they appear to be mocking each other—not the characters, but each other, and by implication a world that would permit such mixing of the life and death forces.

The world of Vitaly Kanévski's *Freeze. Die. Come to Life.* seems to exist outside time, in spite of the fact that the film—the fifty-five-year-old Kanévski's first, which he wrote as well as directed—takes place during the final years of World War II. The terrible conditions of life have remained constant over the past fifty years in the Primorsky region of far-eastern Russia (where the director grew up), specifically in the coal-mining town of Suchan, where *Freeze. Die. Come to Life.* is set, and, thanks to the miracle of telecommunications, natives of the area aren't the only ones who know this. Given his low budget (and some resistance from the Soviet authorities), Kanévski was lucky that he needed neither to re-create the period setting, truck in lots of extras—only local people were used, complemented by non-professionals in the principal roles—nor use the highest-quality film stock. The cinematographer Vladimir Brylyakov shot every one of the film's 105 minutes on outdated or discarded black-and-white stock, and the resulting visuals serendipitously match the gloomy subject matter: grainy, bleak images filled with smoke or mist rather than light, images from which the blacks and grays have all but banished the whites. The war rages on throughout the world, but not in Suchan, which did not need a war in order to arrive at its present, frozen condition: rubble-strewn, mud-covered, poverty-stricken, and Communist-oppressed.

Near the coal-mining settlement sits one of Stalin's infamous labor camps (Kanévski himself spent eight years in one on unspecified charges); and near it lies a camp for Japanese prisoners of war, also sentenced to hard labor. So in effect there are three prisons in Suchan: one for the workers, one for internal "enemies" of the state, and one for its foreign adversaries. Coal miners, their families, and an assortment of camp followers—tradesmen, prostitutes, musicians—live in dank, depressing dormitory-style housing, with everyone on guard against theft, assault, starvation, and freezing to death. (The film's title comes from a game similar to freeze tag played by Suchan's children, but it also functions metaphorically: life-after-death, or death itself, is to be preferred to a life of this kind.) The Japanese are the target of curses as well as jokes, and the Soviet prisoners are targets for execution: on a nearby hillside, we see an inmate hanging from a tree, his body in flames; in the marshes surrounding the settlement, children pass around a photograph of the naked body of a woman executed by gunfire. Of all people in such an environment,

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children get the most attention from Vitaly Kanévski, two in particular: Valerka, a twelve-year-old boy who lives with his single mother, a barkeep cum occasional prostitute, in one room (which they share for a while with a piglet!); and Galia, a girl of the same age whose parents we see little of. These two are the joy and the sorrow of *Freeze. Die. Come to Life.*, it is their relationship that holds the film's episodic narrative together, and it is the acting of that relationship by Pavel Nazarov (discovered by Kanévski at a state orphanage) and Dinara Drukarova that establishes, yet again, unself-conscious play as a style of performance at which children are unsurpassed.

Like most girls her age, Galia is far more grown up than her male counterparts, Valerka included. She calls him a "terminal fool" and he calls her a "snotty Tartar," but each has a stubborn (and, I'm happy to say, innocent) affection for the other, and Valerka comes to depend on Galia for advice in matters of work and play as well as life and death. She teaches him, for example, to sell hot tea in the local marketplace, despite the fact that they then become competitors for the same customers, and she not only finds out who stole his ice skates, she also goes ahead and steals them back for him when he hesitates. It is Galia who reveals to Valerka that an emaciated fifteen-year-old girl who begs a startled stranger for sex does so because she can get a release from the labor camp if she gets pregnant; and it is Galia who retrieves Valerka from the faraway den of killer thieves to which he had withdrawn after being expelled from school (his mother turns him in for sabotaging a Stalinist youth parade by placing yeast in the village sewer system) and derailing a freight train (in retaliation for the beating he received earlier from one of the trainmen for trying to hitch a ride). In a world as difficult as Suchan's, these two don't have much but each other, and in this they are like the adults who surround them.

Galia and Valerka are also like their elders in preferring laughter and song to tears and remonstration, despite the hopeless conditions under which they live. Indeed, I can't remember a film in which such desperate characters—most of them clothed in shapeless, flimsy garments, some of them maimed, others disturbed—laughed and sang so much. Valerka is singing to Galia when we see them for the last time, walking home along the railroad tracks after their narrow escape by train from the criminals for whom he had been working. But the criminals, afraid that Valerka will identify them to the police, have managed to pursue him and Galia on the same train and now shoot them down, off-camera. The camera has uncharacteristically looked away here, has panned to the left over the thawing landscape (it is now early spring); up to this point, it has relentlessly kept its eye on the action, however sordid, often in lengthy full or long shots. It immediately reverts back to form in the scene that follows, as we watch Galia's mother, who has torn all her clothes off, dancing a ritual of grief before an audience not only of her fellow villagers but of the

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director himself, whom we can hear off-camera shouting directions to his cast. Some critics have called this a senseless Brechtian device (if it is, it's by way of Godard). I'm not so sure. What caught my attention was not Kanévski's authorial intrusion, but its apparent lack of effect: no one looks at him, at the camera, no one breaks out of character. It's as if they've become characters in the present as well as the historical past, characters who tacitly declare that in the forty-five years since the end of the war, little has changed for them. Life is still unflinchingly cruel, and its cruelty makes children its easiest, most pathetic victims.

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HAROLD FROMM

The Demons of Deconstruction

In any given week, the attentive reader of periodicals will come upon at least several references, usually hostile or satiric, to the current theoretical doctrines and political practices of humanist academia. In a somewhat bemused article about Marxist historians at the University of Massachusetts, for example, Ron Grossman (*Chicago Tribune*, March 18, 1991) remarked, "Their ideology is deconstructionalism, which they preach with firebrand fervor in faculty meetings and seminars, arguing that all books, even Marx's, are essentially equal." In the Spring 1991 *American Scholar* (which appeared during the same week), Gary Saul Morson wrote about how far academic criticism has gone to prove "that great writers of the past—Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and all other Dead White European Males—may be convicted of racism, sexism, phallocentrism, and imperialism, not to mention . . . 'essentialism,' the horror of which is comprehensible only to avatars of the latest theories." Since his essay was about the quirkily unclassifiable literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, Morson observed with some surprise that Bakhtin had been "saved" from a similar fate by being distorted into a role of political correctness by his academic appropriators—who praise "alterity" but tolerate only sameness.

Hostile essays and books about humanist academia are now appearing at a surprising rate. That their points of view represent the entire political spectrum from extreme right to extreme left is an indication of how serious the loss of confidence seems to be. Although neoconservative critics like Allan Bloom and Roger Kimball have attracted the most attention, the range includes (among others) Peter Shaw, Robert Alter, George Steiner, Frederick Turner, Russell Jacoby, Edward Said, and, as we move further toward the Marxist end, Frank Lentricchia, Richard Ohmann, and Jim Merod (in *The Political Responsibility of the Critic*). Depending on their position, the critics complain either about the academy's repudiation of ancient verities or its triviality and nihilism in lieu of social reform. Both sides agree, however, that the New Left radicals of the sixties have become today's effete bourgeois fatcats, engaged in trashing everything except their own academic tenure. (At the 1990 MLA convention, the remarks of a strident young "radical" professor from Brown describing her cushy life amidst a BMW-infested student body were little short of a scream. I kept imagining Marie Antoinette in designer battle fatigues.)

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David Lehman's *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man*[1] is both similar to and different from all of this writing. By narrowing its focus, first to deconstruction and then to de Man, Lehman has been able to explore more thoroughly and deeply the malaise surrounding literary theory in the academy. Moreover, Lehman himself differs professionally from most of the other critics: on the one hand, he has a Ph.D. in English from Columbia and taught for several years at Hamilton College, but on the other hand he is a poet, editor, journalist, and mystery writer rather than an academic. Thus, while he fully knows *as an insider* both academia and the major texts of literary theory, his point of view is free from the parochial defensiveness of the professional insider. In other words, he is an outsider/insider whose interests extend beyond the self-perpetuations of the professoriate, to society at large. (To leading-edge academics, however, people who think about society at large are little more than amateurs and philistines.)

Signs of the Times, a title taken from an essay by Carlyle urging that we inspect more closely the society around us to see what makes it tick, is also a play on "signs" as the materials of semiology—the science of signs—an obsessional interest of deconstruction. Deconstruction's central dogma, ultimately derived from Saussure, is that words refer to other words *ad infinitum* as part of a closed system of language (or signs), with no outlet possible to an independent world unmediated by words (or signs). This dogma has redirected humanistic study over the past fifteen years to investigate the ways in which words are used to produce virtual worlds, i.e., the mental worlds created by language in which we conduct our daily lives. These worlds turn out to be "texts" in the broadest (yet literal Latin) sense of systems of *interwoven* signs: e.g., the worlds of fashion, of religion, of popular culture, of academic disciplines, of politics, etc., of which books are just the most recognized instance. The particular task that deconstruction set for itself was to take apart the woven, textual worlds of discourse (by which we delude ourselves about "reality") in order to reveal their constructedness, their sociality and conventionality (rather than their naturalness), as well as their ambiguity.

This was hardly a contemptible enterprise and, when done well, could cast considerable light on, say, the essential similarities between superficially different entities like Saddam Hussein and George Bush, and the systems of religion that sanctify evil by preceding murderous acts of destruction with calls for "a holy war" or "a day of prayer." As Roland Barthes did with the worlds of wrestling and clothing, one could do marvelous analyses of sign-systems like the Kierkegaardian scene at the Kennebunkport church service where an anachronistically Christian protester against the war with Iraq was hauled off by

[1] SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Deconstruction and the Fall of Paul de Man, by *David Lehman*. Poseidon Press/Simon & Schuster. $21.95.

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the police while the righteous and politically correct worshipers drowned him out with "God Bless America." (Of course, one could also do this quite well without deconstruction or semiotics.)

Lehman, however, devoting the first half of his book to a description of deconstruction's theoretical and academic backgrounds, its formalist analyses of texts, and its debunking of bourgeois certitudes, necessarily focuses upon its less savory aspects: its lack of interest in both the world and the ethics of everyday life (notwithstanding my putative example above) as well as its hothouse professionalism. Generally characterized as a variety of nihilism, deconstruction nevertheless involves many ideas that seem indisputably correct, although it can hardly claim to have invented them: Words *don't* refer directly to an independent world in the way they imply; meanings *are* never fully recoverable; language *does* have a life of its own once it is severed from its author. The problem with deconstruction, like all fanatic "methods," has always been its inability to distinguish between theory and actuality. Just as Zeno's paradoxes cleverly demonstrated that the things we in fact do every day are theoretically impossible, so deconstruction has always presupposed a *perfect* act of communication that in reality has never been necessary. It has claimed that because people never fully understand what other people say, they understand nothing at all. But as Lehman repeatedly points out, deconstructionists become furious when people misunderstand them. Both Derrida and his disciple, J. Hillis Miller, have produced truly shocking castigations of readers who got them wrong.

Deconstruction has indeed become a form of "critical terrorism" (to use a phrase from Foucault) built upon the priestly resentments of extraordinarily intelligent intellectuals who profess to loathe bourgeois success but who are crazed with a desire for the very power and fame they find so vulgar in people like Donald Trump and Lee Iacocca. Since Trump and Iacocca have no interest in the involutions of academic cerebration, avant-garde literary theorists are forced to antagonize their own more conventional colleagues instead, who at least may be capable of appreciating their insults. An apotheosis of *épater le bourgeois* is accomplished by demonstrating that the apparent meaning of whatever we read, hear, and think is little more than an effect of our own subversion by sign-systems whose operations we are unaware of. This leaves just about everyone in the position of dupes, except for the people who are telling us *we* are the dupes.

As examples *par excellence* of deconstructive techniques, Paul de Man's essays since the early seventies (of which his books are collections) are almost exclusively concerned with the rhetoric and tropes of writing. He has little interest in the experience of reading, aesthetic response or value, literary history, ethics, significance, or the relation between literature and life. Instead, he dwells magisterially upon the ways in which any sort of stable meaning is subverted by the unintended effects of figures of speech and rhetorical devices like

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allegory. And if Zeno's paradoxes sought to prove that Achilles could never beat a tortoise in a race, de Man's essays seek to show us that works of literature can never be properly understood, that they actually deconstruct themselves with their own self-contradictions. Apart from the complexity and general difficulty of his writing, which are obstacles in themselves, it would be possible for a person devoted to literature and the arts to find de Man's work of almost no interest whatsoever, in the same way that a lover of Shakespeare (what a quaint expression in 1991!) might find uninteresting a physico-chemical analysis of the fibers of which the paper was made in an early folio of Shakespeare's plays. De Man uses "literature" as the raw substance of his investigations in the same way that physicists use atoms and molecules as the substance of theirs.

Since de Man's *ipse dixit* style was itself always begging to be deconstructed—for isn't magisteriality just another con game in a system that claims it is impossible to say what you mean?—the shocking revelations about his past are just the sort of thing that Doctor Sophocles might have ordered: the tragic hero zapped by the accumulations of his own hubris. In the second part of his book, David Lehman does more than simply recapitulate the events of de Man's early years—he puts them into a setting of World War II in northern Europe and sees their import in relation to other famous people whose lives were also tainted—Kurt Waldheim, Heidegger, Stravinsky, etc.—as well as to the currents of resistance and collaboration that permeated the war years.

In 1987, four years after de Man's death, a young Belgian graduate student discovered a large cache of articles written by de Man between 1940 and 1942 for the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* and the Flemish *Het Vlaamsche Land*. After the German invasion in 1940, *Le Soir*'s owners fled the country, leaving the paper to be taken over by the Nazis. "For the full two-year period of his association with *Le Soir*," writes Lehman, "de Man advanced the Nazis' cultural agenda in ways small and large. At best he was a defeatist, certain that destiny favored the Germans, and an opportunist, who didn't see why his country's humiliation should stand in the way of his career. At worst he was 'a fascist, an anti-Semite, and an active collaborator with the Nazis,' " according to a study by John Brenkman, a professor from Northwestern University. The articles express optimism about fascism, "We are entering a mystical era, a period for faith and belief, with all this entails in suffering, exaltation, and rapture," as well as a "solution to the Jewish problem that would lead to the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe." The result of such a solution "would not have, for the literary life of the West, regrettable consequences. It would lose, in all, some personalities of mediocre worth and would continue, as in the past, to develop according to its higher laws of evolution."

After the war, de Man was denounced by the Belgian Resistance movement, by whom one of his newspaper colleagues was actually

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assassinated, but he himself escaped any serious consequences from the trials that were held to punish collaborators. He established a publishing house with financial aid from his father, but the business lasted only a short time before de Man departed for the U.S. in 1948, leaving behind "a crowd of angry creditors and the prospect of a lawsuit. He had ruined his father and had earned himself a local reputation for dishonesty." De Man also left behind a common-law wife and three sons, who eventually ended up in Argentina. One of his sons has reported to Lehman that the plan was for the family eventually to link up with his father in the U.S., but they were never sent for and instead de Man married one of his students at Bard College, producing another family. Only very much later did anyone from the second family learn of the existence of the first, with whom de Man had virtually severed all relations. During his careers at various universities—lastly and most famously at Yale—he kept this past quite hidden, except for one incident in which he was forced to deal with some anonymous accusations in order to contain their spread, a dangerous moment that he resolved with equivocation. He further allowed a rumor to stand to the effect that he had actually worked *with* the Belgian Resistance and he at least once claimed that his famous uncle Hendrik de Man was his father.

But what really interests Lehman about de Man's past is that "he would try to overcome it by rejecting the very categories that seek to render the past available—politics, history, biography. By fiat, de Man would declare an inevitable rupture between the world of literature and the world of empirical facts. As for the facts of his personal past, he evaded them with silence, exile, and cunning. And in retrospect, it was his silence about his wartime past that vexed and teased the ranks of his admirers." Lehman is clearly shocked by the response of these admirers, including Derrida, Hillis Miller, and Shoshana Felman, the last of whom he quotes as saying that "de Man's entire writing effort is a silent trace of the reality of an event whose very historicity, borne out by the author's own catastrophic experience, has occurred precisely as the event of preclusion—the event of impossibility—of its own witnessing." This unintelligible verbiage, which Lehman attempts to translate into English, is hardly atypical of the sort of thinking and saying that permeated the de Manian circle. Its members' defenses of his European past, which Lehman exhibits at length, employ the most mendacious of deconstructionist casuistries.

In this well-written, extremely knowledgeable, sometimes bitter book, it is Lehman's final task to attempt some sort of reconciliation between de Man's treacherous past and the doctrines of deconstruction. After quoting several very damaging passages from de Man's essays that read like unwitting commentaries on his past life, Lehman remarks that "the view that substitutes a 'text-machine' for humanity and identifies wars and revolutions as 'texts' would minimize—or even eliminate—the notion that people exercise free will and bear some

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responsibility for their actions." And he asks, "Why should people study philosophy [or literature] if it has a merely clinical interest and does not address the way people lead their lives?" What, in other words, is to be gained from reading de Man if—as his defenders have attempted to do—his deconstructive writings are separated from his life in the world? The book's coda then examines the ways in which deconstruction has continued to infect succeeding trends like new historicism and gender studies, which have superadded its obsession with power and professionalism to their own political agendas.

Although it is hard to imagine that a more well-executed or ethically sensitive synthesis of these extensive and depressing materials is possible or likely, one must concede that Lehman is not ultimately successful in uncovering a connection between a flawed theory and a flawed life. Since deconstruction came later rather than earlier, it would be flat wrong to suggest that B could have "caused" A, nor does Lehman make such a claim. Since de Man did not invent deconstruction, one cannot even say that it was the product of a personality that was capable of all the wretchedness in which de Man was involved. What remains is the proposition of an affinity between de Man's callous, even brutal, irresponsibility and opportunism during the war years and his attraction to and exploitation of the nihilist tendencies of deconstruction during his second life as an American academic, a life, incidentally, in which he was extremely liked, admired, and even reverenced. This establishment of affinity is a worthwhile endeavor, although it does not add up to anything revelatory (except for the cumulative impact of Lehman's skillful synthesis) and leaves us still to face the unfathomable mysteries of the human personality. In the final analysis, Lehman's book is an act of exorcism, even one of expiation and personal sorrow, for an academy that seems increasingly self-righteous, compromised by politics, and sullied by dishonesty.

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GEORGE KEARNS

Fiction: In History and Out

THREE AND A HALF DECADES HAVE PASSED since the publication in Arabic of Naguib Mahfouz's masterpiece, *The Cairo Trilogy*. We owe to the 1988 Nobel Prize its appearance in English: the first volume, *Palace Walk*, last year; now the second, *Palace of Desire*; the final volume, *Sugar Street*, early next year.[1] The trilogy recounts, with Tolstoyan assurance, the lives, marriages and disruptive extramarital passions of a Muslim family of the middling merchant class. Its patriarch is the extraordinary al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, who leads two lives almost successfully walled off from each other. At home he's an austere tyrant, but abroad on nightly rambles through Cairo's pleasure districts a hard-drinking, witty and amorous companion. The focus is always upon one or another member of his family; ceremonial gatherings, conflicts and ritualized negotiations are minutely rendered. Politics and history accompany the family chronicle, usually as a dissonant music off in the middle distance, now louder, now almost forgotten, yet inescapable. *Palace Walk* is set against the British occupation of Egypt during the First World War, and ends in 1919 with the death of the family's second son, Fahmy, in an anti-British demonstration. *Palace of Desire* begins five years later, and ends in 1926 with news of the death of the family's political hero, the nationalist leader, Sa'd Zaghlul. Mahfouz, with the most subtle and non-programmatic touch, makes private worlds resonate against the public. Sa'd Zaghlul's death and our knowledge of the inevitable departure of the British suggest parallels to the decline in vigor and authority of the patriarch and the increasing independence of the sons, especially that of the idealistic, intellectual Kamal.

For the American reader, Mahfouz's writing produces a simultaneous double-reading. One gets caught up in this Muslim family's concerns. Scandals produced by the sexual obsessions of father and sons—leading to unfortunate, unruly marriages, divorces, mistresses and, for the teen-age Kamal, the collapse of romantic enchantment—threaten the private stability of the patriarchal household, the public

[1] PALACE OF DESIRE, by *Naguib Mahfouz*. Trans. by *William Maynard Hutchins, Lorne M. Kenny and Olive E. Kenny*. Doubleday. $22.95. *Palace Walk* has appeared in paper from Anchor Books ($9.95). Doubleday/Anchor have also made available translations of six shorter works by Mahfouz.

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respectability all-important to its perilous social standing, indeed the stability of traditional Muslim structures themselves. Mahfouz is so absorbed in each scene, so effortlessly able to assume with the great story-tellers that the tale he is telling is the only tale worth hearing at the moment, that the reader, as it were, must become a member of the family. A family member, however, uncannily sharing all lives, those of the enclosed, oppressed women, as well as of the men on their nightly debauches in the pleasure districts and private houseboats on the Nile, where they drink forbidden liquors in the company of female "entertainers." The reader is placed, one might say, in a super-patriarchal position, forced to worry about fine balances of power and manners which the males of the family seem recklessly intent on testing to the limits.

Yet immersed as we are in the world of one family and in the domestic, public and demimonde spaces of a Cairo struggling towards independence from British "protection," we are necessarily outsiders as well. It is Mahfouz's minute observation of Cairo life that fascinates, the customs, practices and speech-patterns (like the constant quoting from the Qur'an) of a world only a few devoted Arabists would ever have experienced first hand. We observe thousands of formalities and gestures, so natural to those who make them, so distant from our ways. Here, for example, the twenty-eight-year-old Yasin has come to his father's store to beg permission for something he fully intends to do, contract a second marriage with Maryam, a woman who was beloved by his dead brother; who has been, moreover, tinged with scandal (she is thought to have flirted with a British soldier); and is now a divorcée. But forms must be observed:

> With great courtesy he said, "Please grant me a little of your precious time. Were it not absolutely necessary, I would not have dared to trouble you. But I am unable to undertake a step without your guidance and consent."

Not long after Yasin's questionable marriage, however, lust satisfied and the slightly-scandalous Maryam shut up in his house on Palace of Desire Street, he is back in the pleasure districts. Here he has picked up his father's mistress, the lute-player Zanuba, gotten drunk with her, and has brought her home, where Maryam is presumably soundly asleep upstairs. But Maryam intrudes upon the scene of seduction, hair-pulling and scratching escalate, and she strikes her husband with a slipper. In the midst of what could be a comic mêlée,

> He shouted at her, "I never want to see you again." Then he pronounced the irreversible triple divorce formula: "You're divorced, divorced, divorced!"

That does it; no more Maryam.

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But the exoticism we experience is one offered by a guide unconcerned with our presence as tourists or travellers. Mahfouz, writing in the 1950s, was intent on holding up his modernizing realist mirror to Arabic readers. His energy and narrative confidence derive from the same sources as did those of the great realists in our tradition—George Eliot, Balzac, Joyce, the Mann of *Buddenbrooks*, even Lawrence. His power is not, as in lesser realists, a virtuosity aware that life *can* be represented with illusions of fullness and accuracy; nor a virtuosity that doesn't know what else to do with itself; but rather a moral trust that life *should* be represented, that a society ought to see and think about aspects of itself which through habit or choice it avoids or suppresses. What *The Cairo Trilogy* meant in the fifties, or what it means today to Egyptian readers, I cannot say. For the contemporary American, it rings with strong feminist sympathies in its critique of patriarchal tyrannies and in its representation of the restricted worlds of wives and daughters, as well as of the freer, but still pathetically limited lives of the spirited "entertainers" who age before our eyes as they grind out their commodities of sex and charm for al-Sayyid Ahmad and his cronies. Yet it is in no way a tract merely confirming our worst suspicions about Muslim treatment of women, for it offers complex and varied views of women's lives and powers within official structures.

At the end of *Palace of Desire* we observe the inevitable presence of modernization. The patriarch's authority is crumbling: he's been forced to "relax the rules" and allow his wife to leave the house to visit her married daughters or the neighborhood mosque. The sophisticated Europeanized younger set picnic by the pyramids, drinking beer and eating ham. The Enlightenment arrives as the nineteen-year-old Kamal, losing his Muslim faith, creates great scandal by publishing an article (in 1926!) on Darwin. I look forward to *Sugar Street*.

It would be hard to think of fictions produced in our time more unlike each other, providing such different pleasures, than Mahfouz's solid history and Milorad Pavić's *Landscape Painted with Tea*, where history is absorbed into an insubstantial pageant.[2] "Every book in the world," says one of its voices, "has this secret passion of stopping you from going on." The sentence might have been written by Roland Barthes, our greatest bard (with Whitman) of the erotics of the text. In one of her lives, that of a world-class *diva*, the heroine, Vitacha Milut, sings an impassioned aria about her love for the reader. The Puccini of *Un bel dì* would have seen its possibilities at once.

> Now I want to go out, out into life. You could become my homeland, and I your abroad. . . . If by your gaze you prevent one

[2] LANDSCAPE PAINTED WITH TEA, by *Milorad Pavić*. Trans. by *Christina* Pribićević-Zorić. Alfred A. Knopf. $21.95.

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> of my souls from killing the other, then you need not give me anything, for I shall have everything. . . . If you close your eyes forever, I disappear forever. Imagine that this may be our only meeting before that terrible end. And permit me to worry about you as we worry about those who are our life. Because it *is* so.

Indeed, textual erotics, sheer seduction of the reader, turns out to be the "solution" (printed upside down) to Pavić's crossword puzzle novel. Ordinarily, the ethics of reviewing preclude giving away solutions to puzzles, but *Landscape Painted with Tea* isn't that kind of book, really, for all its playful invitations to read its sections Across, Down, or in what order you wish. What is one to do with a book that asks you to consider whether eternity and infinity are asymmetrical, and that it might be amusing to check the idea mathematically?

Pavić must have been astonished at the success of his *Dictionary of the Khazars*, translated from the Serbo-Croatian into seventeen languages and achieving paperback distribution in American malls—both editions, in fact, the "male" and the "female." I would have thought such intricate game-fiction, confusing real and invented histories, probability and impossibility, until one's ontology was in tatters before a brilliant, learned dream, would have been *quite* caviar to the general. Yet it was, as Hamlet went on, an excellent play, "as I received it [*The Hudson Review*, Summer 1989], and others, whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine." *Landscape Painted with Tea* is more of the same, perhaps a bit lighter in touch. One can't in good conscience claim for Pavić even a thread of redeeming social value: it's all surprise and extravagance of fancy; and it's not difficult to imagine readers stopping going on for reasons other than erotic-aesthetic arrest, enchantment of the heart.

There's no point even in attempting to suggest the story. First there's an unsuccessful Yugoslavian architect, Atanas Svilar, who makes an Odyssean voyage in search of his father, vanished in the War. This tale is interspersed with long sweeps of a history within which I can't sort out what may be real. The two lines converge in fantastic monasteries atop Mount Athos. Then there's another version of the architect—he has two names—as a fabulously wealthy California tycoon: perhaps it's what happened to him on the road not taken, although, in a Pavić text one *can* be two travellers. Characters have more than one name, change genders, and transmigrate through several stories at once. As I said of *Dictionary of the Khazars*, Pavić provides a music to be heard nowhere else. He can be funny, too: among the riches of this text are hilariously straight-faced portrayals of the expensive, eclectically tacky homes and palaces of Josip Broz Tito, rendered in tea. Would you think a landscape painted in tea might be, well, rather monochrome? Not in Pavić; here is a vista of Tito's summer palace:

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> Some ten types of tea were used to paint the sea: one could immediately recognize Chinese black tea, laid on in a very thick coat; Earl Grey, extremely diluted; "Little Nun," used cold or perhaps simply soaked in mineral water before cooking; green maté, generously applied to highlight the sea; while the "tropanas," a dark fruit tea, and "Winter Dreams," a broken tea were spread on. . . . The golden Nepal, a pinch of "Margarita's Hope," and the dark-red Piña Colada were used to paint the islands and the mainland. The sky was washed . . . with the expensive Russian white tea . . .

Would there were some text-specific Lethe-water one could swallow after reading Robert Coover's *Pinocchio in Venice*, which leaves me feeling soiled, defiled, *gross*.[3] I knew I should have stopped, but, authentic sinner, I went on of my own free will. That Coover is supremely clever has long been established; he has gathered more prizes, grants and fellowships than a fetish has nails and feathers. The whole dictionary and a set of reference books are right there in his fingers, available to word-processing through a gift for sinister pastiche. He sprinkles rhinestones and sequins over a midden, not to improve the midden but to lure victims. For if there's a purpose to the over-ripe sophistication that lends styles to Coover's scatology of disillusion, it would seem to be that of defecating on anything the human race has ever found pleasant or believed in. I mean this literally, as I'll explain in a moment.

Briefly, the post-modernized story goes like this: At the end of Carlo Collodi's 1880 children's classic, itself quite nasty, our little puppet turned into a "real boy." Who, in Coover, grew up to a brief career in Hollywood. (To read Collodi is to appreciate Walt Disney's gift for cosmetic surgery.) Then he became Professor Pinenut, an American academic with humanist pretensions sufficient for two Nobel Prizes. Now he's a creaking professor emeritus returned to Italy, to Venice, to complete an autobiographical work and to search for the only mother-figure he ever knew, Collodi's blue-haired Fairy. In Coover's phantasmagoric Venice of masks, harlequins and carnival, he is humiliated, battered and besmirched in every way a Satanic author can devise, apparently as punishment for having written humanist works. Fragments of Collodi's tale pop up in transformations. The blue-haired Fairy is a coarse slut of an American co-ed from the fifties. (In this most misogynist of contemporary texts, by the way, there are no un-be-slutted females or feminine images.) Pinocchio once turned into a donkey, so the professor is baked into a donkey-shaped pizza, and after having had a hole bored in his rear with an apple corer (yes!), is given a ricotta-filled cannoni for a tail.

[3] PINOCCHIO IN VENICE, by *Robert Coover*. Linden Press/Simon & Schuster. $19.95.

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I kept reading this book because hypnotized, I couldn't believe my eyes, by Coover's fascination with shit, ass-holes, and anything metonymically associated with the same: enemas; arse pimples (pun on Art Principles); whoopee cushions; chamber pots; turds as "saints' relics" (and vice versa); a "peach of an ash"; the fouling of clothes; *merdaio*; *cacca*; buggering; hemorrhoids; diapers on the Ducal Palace, and, not in my dictionary, rectum snakes. This is a mere elegant sampling: mostly it's just our demotic pals like "shit" and "ass-hole." I stopped counting at about two hundred, but the count must go over a thousand, for there are few pages free of the thematic, and some that let go, as it were, half a dozen. *This goes elsewhere than art.* Someone—let me be polite and invoke our old companion, the "implied author"—someone has a problem. Genitals fare badly, too, in this text, especially when they mingle with philosophy in Duns Scrotum (sic) and Immaculate Kunt (sick). Anything sacred must be made vile, insistently, obsessively; so we have a plenitude of things (I can't bring myself to type out the worst) such as the Fourteen Urinals of the Cross, a Bellini madonna with a penis drawn in her mouth, a Madonna of the Organs "reaching into the scarlet folds of her glistening vagina with both hands and pulling out her ovaries which she proceeds to flick on their fallopian strings at the Count's shaft like little pink yo-yos." No, no, Coover is only superficially post-modern, if suffering from a style that might be firmed up by a bit of Kaopectate. His true genres, sturdy, unchallenged, charmless as they ever were, include the locker-room story and the crudely-drawn dirty comics we had as kids about the sexual exploits and remarkable physicalities of Orphan Annie and Dick Tracy. Let us turn to something better.

"Let me confess to you at once that if I had not, on the spur of the moment, picked up my pen and scribbled a note to George Smiley inviting him to address my passing-out class on the closing evening of their entry course—and had Smiley not, against all my expectations, consented—I would not be making so free to you with my heart." With these words, spoken by a new narrator, a spymaster named Ned, John le Carré squares the circle of his series about George Smiley, who with the help of Alec Guinness (to whom *The Secret Pilgrim* is dedicated) became an authentic myth of our time.[4] Smiley has come out of retirement for one evening of mellow after-dinner frankness with a graduating class of junior spies. (Or is "retirement" his latest cover? Smiley and his old colleague-adversaries at Moscow Centre sit on a secret committee to share information on the Middle East.) This bright autumnal novel—anecdotal, nostalgic, enigmatically final—appears to be the last collaboration between author and hero. Yet when a master of narrative illusion like le Carré, even under the cover of "Ned," tells us that he's about to make free with his heart, we'd

[4] THE SECRET PILGRIM, by *John le Carré*. Alfred A. Knopf. $21.95.

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better beware. This is not just a rich evening of story-telling, the latest book in a fabulous series, but the swan song, the elegy for a genre, and in some sense its revision from another, perhaps incommensurable perspective as well.

The "new world order" may be a dubious concept in Realpolitik, but in the realm of the imaginary it has taken immediate force and is already in place. How can there be business as usual in the spy novel? What scope can there be for a Smiley, a Peter Guillam, when the real world equivalents of Moscow Centre and the Circus are busy telling each other All, the chill is off, the bugged offices suddenly replete with CNN cameras, the Great Game over, and the firm of Deighton and le Carré Ltd. already dated? Shall we then lament the passing of the genre? Not if we've read our le Carré with care. In the first place, that passing was already foretold in his pages, and foretold, with remarkable detachment and foresight, neither as apocalypse nor as millennium, but as a form of entropy. The possibility of the ultimate deflation and collapse of the hero-spy haunted every one of his novels, from *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (remember how the sheer urbanity of that book astonished us, used as we were to various crudities from Buchan to Bond), through the aptly named *The Looking Glass War* to perhaps the greatest spy novel of all, the classic, chaste and perfect *Smiley's People*. It was present in every Smiley story as an always deferred but always threatening moment in which every difference would be reduced to sameness and the spies would confront their mirror opposites with no advantage whatsoever of personal or political morality on either side. (By the way, to appreciate *Smiley's People* fully, listen to le Carré reading it on tape. The mystery of his perfect rendering of the link between bureaucratic function and personal style is here unveiled.)

So well has le Carré known about our abjection within a political and moral void beneath high-tech and unspeakably value-neutral toys of war, that he has twice almost been driven to tip his hand, to step over the line between high and popular art—the observance of which limitation has been, for him, a form of modesty, a consistent ethical practice in itself—and attempt to tell us so straight out. Each time, significantly, he has left George Smiley aside to do so. In *The Little Drummer Girl*, he made the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its attendant horrors a diptych, with each side perfectly reproducing the rationale, the terror, and the misplaced devotion to purity of the other. In the recent *Russia House*, the first of his novels le Carré chose to discuss in the press, he was so uncannily accurate about the then state of the U.S.S.R. as to have given the impression that it might equally well have emanated from the pen of a KGB subversive.

The problem with *The Little Drummer Girl*, which exercised a hypnotic fascination over almost everyone who read it, but ultimately left a taste of ashes in the mouth, was precisely its symmetry. For so vivid and committed a re-creation of human political and ethical evil

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to end in a sort of "plague on both your houses" seemed a cop-out, when the whole situation cried out for commitment on one side or the other, and when for many the Palestinian form of that cry was only heard or perhaps only audible within le Carré's artful pages. The problem with *Russia House* was the sense of extreme pressure from without, as if the situation in the novel—the time so brief for one to make one's point and the matter so urgent, whole lives and careers and countries, perhaps the world itself, at stake—was all too perfectly recapitulated by the situation of the novelist, desperate to awaken us and to justify the ethics of his chosen and much-compromised medium before the curtain fell and the genre itself.

Smiley could not be present in these anomalous attempts at more explicit and potentially self-destructive political statements. For the essential narrative function of Smiley was/is purely and simply to preserve, against all odds, a good conscience, a sense of being on the right side of history after all. And the real suspense in le Carré is when, at what point, and in what circumstances, will this posture of moral, political and ethical justification by history ultimately break down before the compromise of means and ends it entails. I am tempted, here, to make fun of this "good-conscience" function of Smiley's, so essential to the *plaisir du texte*, the readerly satisfaction, this genre offers us. For Smiley is surely a figure easy to mock, the shabby, bumbling quasi-Oxbridge don who proves, in matters practical, at once the chivalrous and ruthless knight. And in *The Secret Pilgrim*, this suspense comes much to the fore. But in the light of current events what, after all, is there to mock about Smiley? He *was*, it seems, in the right, and not only that, he has now proved, quite unexpectedly, to be on the *winning* side as well. As a combination, it's hard to beat, if perhaps a little hard to take for those whom history has left behind this time around, or for those who have a quirky, perhaps sentimental, distaste for personal deception or elaborate weapons and stratagems of war.

But, as I have suggested, there is a certain aspect of *caveat lector* in *The Secret Pilgrim*. The suspense in this novel is displaced more than slightly, indeed almost entirely, onto another narrative level than the one on which we conventionally read le Carré. The issue here is not who will betray whom, but will Smiley betray himself and his author. Will he, now that the cold war is over, look back on all he has done and make the elegant recantation of which he is no doubt eminently capable? Because what *was* it all about, in the end, the double- and triple-crossing of friends and lovers and the pathetic deaths of the "little people" whose bodies are strewn about so frequently in those shabby East European rooms and suspiciously similar cheap hotels? Ned's stories, interwoven with Smiley's after-dinner *causerie*, raise this issue repeatedly, from the first betrayal of his dearest friend, whose life of subsequent self-punitive disempowerment shadows the whole series, to the last supremely cruel and achingly deliberate unmasking of a pathetic and duped old Brit who has been emotionally suckered

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into sending cryptogram codes to the Russians, with all the clanking apparatus of the trade and genre much in play, including double messages over the radio and concealed headsets and crystals.

Smiley, it seems, neither wishes to recant nor to revise, though perhaps to mitigate. "Quizzed" by a young idealist about British colonialism and its indifference to its victims, he remarks that he rather agrees. Asked whether spying is not an anachronistic choice of vocation, he laughs the laugh of Tiresias. His support for the new recruits and their decision to embark on a lifetime of spying never wavers, even under the impact of tale after tale of idiocy, folly and deceit. His sense of what, for lack of a more modest word, we must call their "mission" remains. It merely takes a new form.

And that new form is in part the logical culmination of all the self-betrayals and self-interrogations, the workings of moles and mole-chasers within the Circus itself that have helped lay the clever devices and cunning traps of the le Carré world, and yet it is also in part the mark of their final destruction. For what Smiley enjoins upon the young is their duty not to the state but to its necessary subversion, subversion not in the name of some political stance or ideology, but in the name of common decency, of humanity. "We've given up far too many freedoms in order to be free," Smiley concludes. "Now it's time to take them back." Then, pausing at the door, "Tell them to spy on the ozone layer, will you, Ned?" Exit, stage left. And a great exit it is, too. The final pages are gorgeously sentimental, valedictory, and novelistically self-reflexive: "It's over, and so am I. Absolutely over. Time you rang down the curtain on yesterday's cold warrior. And please don't ask me back, ever again."

"Think now," wrote a greater artist, himself not unlike George Smiley in some ways, his work equally lit and shadowed by commitment and compromise,

> History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
> And issues . . .
> Gives too late
> What's not believed in, or is still believed,
> In memory only, reconsidered passion . . .
> Think
> Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
> Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
> Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Fiction Chronicle

YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED LAST SPRING that a publicity campaign of some energy was built around a handsomely packaged little novel titled *Damage*, in which a British MP is unwise enough to fall for a mystery woman in black to whom his son is engaged.[1] Sounds unpromising, but that old taste-tester who heads up Knopf, Sonny Mehta—he who had already brought us Bret Easton Ellis' shocker—was knocked off his pins by the book. After showing it to his colleagues in the Knopf boardroom, they all agreed that, in Mr. Mehta's words, "it was the most shocking, haunting and erotic novel we had read." What recourse then but to haul out the big guns and boom away for Josephine Hart, or—whisper the name—Mrs. Maurice Saatchi. What captivated Sonny and his friends I take to have been powerful eroticism like the following episode in which the mysterious Anna kneels before her bedazzled MP, "lips parted, mouth open, waiting":

> I worshiped her. Her head was thrown back, her eyes were closed, as though in some ritual act of genuflection.
>
> Subsumed into her. Consummation. Of a kind. . . . Drained by her, I thought of the hopelessness of pleasure. I was still trapped within my own body.

With writing like this it's no wonder that Erica Jong, herself an old hand at rapturous lyricism, should chip in with the claim to having discovered, in Josephine Hart, "a remarkably fresh literary voice." Anyway it's a book you can get through at a sitting and will probably do you no permanent harm.

Paul Theroux's latest can also be consumed about as quickly, but it stays in the mind afterwards, disturbingly, and I reread it with no decrease in attention.[2] Mr. Theroux has worked the urban sex-thriller territory before (in the London of "Dr. Slaughter") but ups the ante here. Set, surprisingly, in Chicago during the heat wave of summer 1988, the novel's hero is a successful architect-real estate developer named Parker Jagoda who lives in Evanston, is married to a glamorous woman, has a child. But—and here's where the hitch (or story) comes in—Parker has placed a personal ad in the paper ("seeking

[1] DAMAGE, by *Josephine Hart*. Alfred A. Knopf. $18.00.
[2] CHICAGO LOOP, by *Paul Theroux*. Random House. $19.00.

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open-minded fun-loving fem. for dates, companionship and future") and on his first "date" with a woman named Sharon finds himself making a meal of her (à la Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs*). For this he is dubbed The Wolfman, and the rest of *Chicago Loop* tersely traces his descent into hell, a city doubtless very much like Chicago that July.

Everything counts in the novel, and counts against Parker's sanity. In a fine scene, he and his wife attend the Mapplethorpe exhibition, which Parker finds repellent. But at this early point in the novel he is still able to impersonate and satirize in a manner that is original and funny: " 'Apparently this Mapplethorpe is a homosexual,' Parker said loudly, making his expression as solemn as possible." By way of shocking the silent onlookers, "shuffling past the pictures, and peering, and accepting it all," Parker puts on a rival show, asking Barbara

> "Is that a zucchini or a pecker? It's hard to tell the difference. Here's another guy wearing a hat—they love cowboy hats! The titles are terrific. 'Kurt.' 'Jim.' 'North Sedgewick Street.' Another Sausalito. I was in Sausalito last year, and I didn't see that bald bare-assed man crouched on that fire hydrant. That *is* a fire hydrant and not another pecker, isn't it?"

"Pecker" gives the right homey flavor. But this is one of Parker's last moments of control, and as the novel follows his downward course (during which he changes from a health-food nut to a rabid consumer of the greasiest junk) the jokes disappear and the tone becomes less varied, an overall grey-black. It may have been the accident of teaching Matthew Arnold as I read Theroux's novel (a strange pairing) but I was struck by Arnold's memorable words describing why, in the 1853 edition of his poems, he suppressed "Empedocles on Etna." Arnold decided that no "poetical enjoyment" could be derived from a work "in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continual state of mental distress is prolonged unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done." Arnold said that there was inevitably something morbid in such a situation and that its representation in poetry was painful rather than tragic. Theroux does relieve his hero's distress with incident, even with some hope and resistance, but the overall effect is as Arnold claimed. But very much worth attending to, like everything this enormously gifted writer turns his hand to.

Though Alice Adams and Gail Godwin both labor in the vineyard of old-fashioned realism, they share only the good ear that makes for lucid prose.[3] Adams' fictions—whether stories or novels—leave not a

[3] CAROLINE'S DAUGHTERS, by *Alice Adams*. Alfred A. Knopf. $22.00. FATHER MELANCHOLY'S DAUGHTER, by *Gail Godwin*. William Morrow. $21.95.

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trace behind (in looking over her titles I found I'd confused one with another). *Caroline's Daughters* is about a mother and her five grown girls, all of them—and mother too—caught up in sexual and professional intrigues. We follow the fortunes of first one, then another; the narrative method is slick and predictable, rendering the San Francisco scene—parks, restaurants, general ambiance—with ease and accuracy. But there is absolutely nothing to think about: the transparent prose puts up no resistance to the reader moving easily about its surface. Here is third daughter Fiona, who runs a restaurant:

> She can't work it out, but all around her everyone seems to be getting it on with someone else who works there; the very air is full of sex, romance, with whispers and whispery, sexy laughs. Along with the cooking aromas, the wonderful garlic and fish smells, the lemon and rosemary.
>
> Even the two young women who deliver flowers for Stevie every morning are lovers, one tall and black, the other small and fair.
>
> In other words, everyone at Fiona's is doing a lot of sex. Except Fiona.

"Getting it on," "doing" sex—admittedly we're to take this language as the way Fiona muses. But there's no evidence Alice Adams finds anything callow in such musings, and the author's breezy tolerance of whatever any of her characters think or say grows eventually depressing. It's all, somehow, weightless and unsubstantial.

Not so with Gail Godwin. I passed up her last long novel, *A Southern Family*, but thought *The Finishing School*—which preceded it—first rate, both elegantly finished and thoughtful. Reading Godwin you have the sense that there's thought going on—that she hasn't made it all up in advance but is thinking about where she wants to take us, and to be taken. *The Finishing School* was about a young girl under the spell of an older woman, an actress; the psychic drama was played out against a fully realized land-and-townscape somewhere in Dutchess County, New York State. *Father Melancholy's Daughter* is just as solidly set, in a small Virginia town called Romulus where another young woman, Margaret Gower, lives with her father, an Episcopal minister prone to fits of depression. The book's action springs from the decision of Margaret's mother Ruth, to forsake husband and daughter for the company of an old school friend named Madelayn, a playwright-rebel-aesthete. The mother is subsequently killed while visiting England with her friend, and she leaves behind much matter for Margaret to work out and speculate on.

The novel's social texture is as dense as its psychological one; here is Margaret registering her town as she drives home from the university in Charlottesville to visit her father:

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> On through poor dead downtown Romulus, which like so many American downtowns had had its lifeblood sucked dry by the vampire malls. The flag flew over the post office and the courthouse was still in business, but the stores, what few were still open, had become debased versions of themselves. . . . Whenever I drove through downtown now, I got a foretaste of what it would be like to be old: you would go around looking through places and people and seeing them not as they had become, but bathed in the consolingly vivid light of memory.

From the leisured spaciousness of such writing, you can see that the novel will be lengthy, and indeed it goes on too long, especially in the pages subsequent to Rev. Gower's sudden death—pages in which Margaret attempts to find herself. But along the way there are many good evocations of ecclesiastical daily life, from the extravagantly long service on Palm Sunday ("the most squirm-worthy Sunday in the Church Calendar," notes Margaret's witty mother before she departs), to the mundaneness of a Vestry meeting. Pervading the book is Godwin's sensitive rumination, often in an authentically poetic style. What does the mourner do to feed her necessity for dwelling on the dead person?

> You seek out objects and places that will feed the mystery. A renewed passport that will never be stamped by any immigration official; a thick stand of ivy at a corner from which debris must still be removed, even though there is no cross there anymore; the way the light falls on a study desk at a certain time of day, when you are cleaning out the drawers; the cemetery, with all the dates now filled in, on a certain jointly shared stone, visited faithfully every Sunday.

Here as elsewhere in the novel one feels that experience is being explored rather than exploited.

A.S. Byatt's *Possession* won so much prize money in England that I was prepared to be respectful of this hefty Romance, as its subtitle announces it to be.[4] The jacket cover is a Burne-Jones painting (*The Beguiling of Merlin*) and the book's typography is done with style; the only problem I had was with, as we used to say, its content. Hawthorne in his preface to *House of the Seven Gables* (Byatt draws on it for her epigraph) claims "a certain latitude" for himself as a romance writer in "the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting from us." In *Possession* two scholars of Victorian poetry join efforts, eventually more than scholarly ones, in their attempt to investigate the hitherto unprobed relationship between a poet named Randolph Henry Ash and his contemporary Christabel LaMotte. The

[4] POSSESSION, by *A.S. Byatt.* Random House. $22.95.

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usual trappings of scholarly investigation are here—letters that come to light, possessors of them to be interviewed (in one of the book's best scenes), speculations about Randolph and Christabel's relationship to be entertained. There are other competitors in the scholarly sweepstakes, and Byatt keeps things moving along for a while with some good observation and good comedy apropos of two scholars in search of the Truth. But, like the Burne-Jones on its cover, *Possession* is heavily and ornately overlaid with literariness. One should have seen it coming from the book's opening which quotes some lines from Ash's imaginary poem "The Garden of Proserpina, 1861":

> These things are there. The garden and the tree
> The serpent at its root, the fruit of gold
> The woman in the shadow of the boughs
> The running water and the grassy space.
> They are and were there. At the old world's rim,
> In the Hesperidean grove, the fruit
> Glowed golden on eternal boughs, and there
> The dragon Ladon crisped his jewelled crest
> Scraped a gold claw and sharped a golden tooth . . .

Not at all my dish of tea. Byatt has manufactured many such pages of poems and prose, supposedly by Ash or LaMotte; everything in them reeks of Tennyson and Browning and Swinburne and the Rossettis and William Morris—in fact I have never read a more *literary* work than this one, alas.

Still, compared to the much acclaimed joint product of our Native American dream combo, Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich, *Possession* is a work of high art.[5] In fact, the acclaim for the Dorris-Erdrich venture (they're married too, you know) has been almost entirely the creation of publicity: 150,000 first printing; $200,000 ad/promo; author tour; BMOC alternate; film rights to Cinecom; first serial to *Caliban*, *Mother Jones*, *Redbook*. Shall I go on? or have I said enough? (as the Lady said to Comus). Of course you can't judge a book by its ad/promo budget—but how about by its prose? Here we have the happy fictional pair, Vivian Twostar and her man Roger Williams, in pursuit of their respective Columbus projects (he's writing a poem about CC, while she's discovered the great man's lost diary, perhaps), having skipped out of Dartmouth to a Carib isle where, when not doing detective work, they cavort on the beach:

> I turned to Roger. Sand stuck like sugar powder to his shoulders. His eyes were pure. I lay my head on his chest. I could feel his heart, efficient as a Swedish motor, throb against my temple. I traced the swimmer's muscles, long and taut, in his arms.

[5] THE CROWN OF COLUMBUS, by *Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich*. HarperCollins. $21.95.

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"It's really something," I said. "Together like that."
"I know."

As you can see, a novel anyone can read without effort—except perhaps for the chapter containing Roger's poem, "Diary of a Lost Man," which stretches over sixteen pages and is deeply profound:

> I do not know myself. No more than the thread
> woven in the field of cloth
> knows the pattern. No more than the pattern
> apprehends the mind that devised it, or the hand
> that threw the shuttle or the strength
> that bent and pegged the wooden loom.
> No more than the garment
> knows its purpose, its maker,
> do I know Columbus.

I'll buy that, but what about those line breaks! It is astonishing the way novelists who have developed a facility for narrative prose think they can also get away with writing verse that will pass muster. (We are to assume, in *The Crown of Columbus*, that Roger's poem is something more than contemptible.) So much for this wholly forgettable entry in the Columbus derby; it's interesting though, even heartening, that with the exception of Michiko Kakutani (who compared it glowingly to *Possession*) reviewers have not been taken in by this production by (as the blurb has it) "the most important literary couple in America."

Previously known to me as the author of a good book on D.H. Lawrence, Cornelia Nixon has now stepped forth with an artful collection of related stories about a family.[6] Like Rand Richards Cooper's *The Last to Go* of a couple of years back, Nixon's work is billed as a novel, her publisher hoping that by so calling it, more force will accrue. Her chronicle is much slimmer and more selective than Cooper's: its setting mainly Berkeley in the sixties, especially 1968; its focus an eccentric professor of philosophy at the university, his German refugee wife, and four children of various disposition. The pleasure of such a family chronicle is to observe from different angles of narration—changes in point of view keeping things fresh but always "related." The risk is of disjuctiveness, gaps in the family's experience that don't get filled in, and here Nixon's relatively short book is vulnerable. But the writing is impressive, as in a subdued moment like this one when Ella, the mother, is making drapes for her new home:

> In other cities you could see women on the streets, watching out the windows, coming and going from little shops. But in Berkeley there

[6] NOW YOU SEE IT, by *Cornelia Nixon*. Little, Brown. $17.95.

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> was too much space, everyone lived in a separate house, moated with yard, and no one walked, everyone drove cars. Loneliness came in the window like the ocean air. Standing on a chair, unhooking the drapes, she could see details on the campanile, kilometers away: pale stone against dark trees, arches opening to a blue pure as ether, and not a human form in sight.

This has the lyric touch and calm authority of a writer who takes time to care.

There is wit in evidence as well, especially when the focus shifts to the father, Edward, or to one of his sons, David, who (in a chapter titled "Death Angel") works at an animal shelter, putting stray dogs out of their misery. One of the puppies tries to lick his face and David warns him, "Yo, don't lick the death angel," triggering a reflection about the similarly named lethal mushroom:

> Tiny, slender and white, even one could wipe out a whole dinner party. This winter they were getting a lot of rain, and over Christmas it had happened more than once, in Berkeley and other places around the bay. Of course it might not always be an accident. Spend a couple of years tramping around in muddy boots, scrambling up ravines and forcing harmless mushrooms on your friends, then one gloomy Christmas Eve you slip one of the little white ones in with the brown and take along your wife, your mother-in-law, the chairman of your department, whoever you have in mind, and nobody calls it murder or suicide.

I'm not sure that *Now You See It* is more than the sum of its parts, but the parts are very good indeed.

Ordinarily when a novel proves too difficult for my powers of sustained attentiveness and reasonable comprehension, I have the decency not to write about it. But having admired Evan Connell's work for many years now and having touted and presented as gifts the Bridge books when they were neglected classics, I can't leave unrecorded the appearance of Connell's fifteenth book.[7] *Book* rather than novel, since *The Alchymist's Journal* is no novel, indeed not anything I can think to call it. Taken together Connell's works present an interesting and unusual literary career, since on one hand they reveal a masterly traffic with ordinary life (the two Bridge novels), on the other an arcane sensibility interested in philosophical-poetic reflection, astronomy, archeology, voyages of exploration and discovery (*Points for a Compass Rose, The White Lantern, A Long Desire*). No question which side of him is revealed in these pages purporting to be the journal entries of seven alchemical sages, all of them—save

[7] THE ALCHYMIST'S JOURNAL, by *Evan S. Connell.* North Point Press. $19.95.

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Paracelsus—unidentified. No story, no characters, and, as far as I could detect, no progression. Most of the entries were impenetrable to this uninformed sensibility; I read, got lost, reread, got lost, put the book down, took it up again, got lost etc. Here is one of its easiest entries:

> Salt, Sour, Sweet, Bitter—these four savors a body accepts, but how often foolish men misapply the fragile cup consigned to their use. We have been offered a cornucopia of pleasures such as spiced wine to accompany our meals, music urging us to dance, friends for conversation, illustrated manuscripts for enlightenment, docile beasts, et cetera. Still we expend this provender immoderately, by giving way to intemperance—raging against our fate—unlike animals which do not doubt themselves and thus live comfortably. Subordinate creatures refuse to eat or drink injurious material, selecting instead what nutriment they require through natural instinct whereas men yield to gluttony, swallow foreign liquid, make flatulent speeches, load their bellies with carnage, defile themselves, rake over the world and succumb to grief.

There are other comparably good bits. But on the whole an erudite sport, mysterious as its subject.

Over a decade ago, reviewing Thomas Berger's *Neighbors*, Thomas R. Edwards called America's failure to read and study Berger "a national disgrace." At that time I was part of the disgrace, but in the past few years have been putting in my time with this marvelous writer who, if anything, gets better with age. *Neighbors* was followed by the excellent *Reinhart's Women* (1981), the fourth and perhaps funniest of the Reinhart novels, two of which began his career. Then came *The Feud* (1983), a comedy as black as *Neighbors*. Over the past four years Berger has upped his rate of production and turned out four novels which seem to me to stand near the top of his achievement (though I have yet to read all of him). *Being Invisible* (1987) is a richly inventive turn on H.G. Wells as it tracks a Manhattan ad writer who finds he has the power to disappear at will. *The Houseguest* (1988, and my favorite) celebrates the fortunes of Chuck Burgoyne, an accomplished and sinister visitor whom nobody remembers inviting and who is not about to leave. *Changing the Past* (1989) is about a man who has the power to do just that, with predictably lamentable results. Each of these fantasies is written in contemporary Americanese, an easy narrative language that accommodates violence, sexual innuendo and dirty talk, and rich varieties of sleazy behavior by the most unlovely ordinary people doing the sorts of things Americans do. Berger's language is a constant source of amazement and delight for the reader who gives himself to it. How could one not be hooked by the very first sentence of *The Houseguest*: "The process that led to the decision to kill Chuck Burgoyne, who for the first week of his visit had

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proved the perfect houseguest, began on Sunday when, though he had promised to prepare breakfast for all (he was a superb cook) he had not yet appeared in the kitchen by half past noon." In its way, it's as good as Henry James.

Orrie's Story is set back in time, at the end of World War II, when Augie Mencken, a supposed war hero (actually he's only been pretending to be in the service) returns to his small town where his wife, Esther, and his cousin E.G. (or Erle) are preparing to kill him for his insurance.[8] The "Orrie" of the title (you may have guessed by now that the novel is a riff on the *Oresteia*), is away at school, but after the murder comes home and joins forces with his sister Ellie to punish the evildoers. Periodically we listen to a Chorus of beer drinkers at the Idle Hour Bar & Grill, commenting on the action in their imperceptive way. Berger (unlike Aeschylus) has throughout his career been a master at contriving embarrassments, awkward situations that make characters ask "*Now*, what'll we do?" So Esther plans to get her returned husband Augie to have himself a bath, with the electric fan running on its none-too-secure perch above the tub. While he bathes she, with a push on the thin wall from a spot in her bedroom, will dislodge the fan which, falling into the tub will electrocute Augie. It is a supremely tacky, Rube Goldberg-like plan, and of course it doesn't work. The fan merely hits Augie on the head, more or less knocking him unconscious, and in fact the cord wasn't long enough anyway for the fan to reach the water. (" 'Look at this,' [says E.G. furiously] 'It wasn't *ever* long enough to reach the water. You didn't even test it, did you. I *told* you to test it and you didn't. For Christ's sake, *you didn't test it!*'") So E.G. is forced into action, and he and Esther rather horribly drown the helpless Augie. This is what Greek Tragedy has come to? Well, do you feel more sympathetic to Clytemnestra?

From a writer so committed, it has seemed, to a radically cynical view of life, always delighted to demonstrate that his imagined characters are even more vicious and vulgar than they appear to be, the second half of *Orrie's Story*, in which the children assert themselves and come out of it rather well, even nobly, is a pleasant shock. I'm not sure that as a whole the book is quite as convincing as its immediate predecessors mentioned above. But at any event it's one further incidence of the remarkable powers of an eminently rereadable novelist.

[8] ORRIE'S STORY, by *Thomas Berger*. Little, Brown. $18.95.

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DAVID MASON

Poetry Chronicle

WHEN WE SPEAK HIGHLY OF POLITICAL POETRY we usually mean poetry that opposes someone else's point of view. Political poets are valued for the valor of their pronouncements; if their cause is just, their poems are important. Unfortunately, history has a way of complicating things. As the late Terrence Des Pres put it, "Political events . . . can discredit in a day the hard-held convictions of a lifetime" (he was writing about Brecht). Much political poetry is occasional, and the immediate significance of the occasion is supposed to excuse the poet's lame expressions, vanity, sentimentality, blindness or outright lies. It is too easy for political poets to be bad writers, preening before the self-created image of their own righteousness. Nevertheless, as I read through the eighteen books considered for this review, I found myself bored by poets for whom little was at stake. When the accuracy, memorability or beauty of language quickened my interest, I frequently discovered that I was also reading poetry of social significance. This poetry suggested that words had meaning in relation to actual events, to a world in which few people vote and fewer read good writing. Good political poetry, I decided, is good poetry that includes politics.

Though Thomas McGrath has often been called a great political poet, the appellation is imprecise. Certainly politics delayed his recognition by the literary establishment (McGrath must be the most famous neglected poet of recent decades). When he died in September 1990, his work was receiving greater attention than ever, but I would argue that he deserved more. When I finally read through all of his verse (I haven't read the novels, filmscripts, children's books, etc.), I came away feeling that here was the real thing. He wrote a lot of political poems, some good, some awful, but what survives in the work is more complicated than anyone's party line: a voice that is both extraordinarily beautiful and exasperatingly uneven. McGrath would never win awards for neatness, but he had a formal and intellectual reach that beggars the work of many more famous poets. He was both *engagé* and academic, populist bard and recondite craftsman, even a formalist—which is to say he worked well in a variety of forms. The loose hexameters of *Letter to an Imaginary Friend* might have made a fine translation of Homer. He could write gorgeous lyrics like "The World of the Perfect Tear" or "The Bread of This World," poems suggesting a range of influences far broader than is implied by the

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usual comparisons to Whitman. His compassionate anger and verbal play are what I remember most; reading his best poems I catch echoes of Dante, Chaucer, Hopkins, Joyce, Crane, MacNeice, Thomas—even the "Eliot Auden" he made fun of in "Ars Poetica."

I could go on. The publication of *Death Song*, McGrath's last collection, is bound to summon up eulogistic praise.[1] Luckily for us, it is a good book, though it represents his faults along with his strengths. Equally composed of small, epigrammatic poems and longer lyrics, *Death Song* is McGrath's most autumnal work. The invective for which he is justly known has softened in his preparation for death:

> And so, in the imperial extension of the dark,
> Against which, all my life, I opposed my body,
> I long to pass from this anguish of passings
> Into the calm of an indifferent joy . . .
>
> To enter October's frail canoe and drift down
> Down with the bright leaves among the raucous wildfowl
> On the narrowing autumn river where, in these longer nights,
> Secretly, in the shallows or on reedy shorelines,
> Ice is already forming.

In this poem, "Longing," he came close to predicting the moment when he would die. But though the book is McGrath's own death song, it takes note of other deaths as well. "Slaughterhouse Music," for example, evokes both the ignominious fate of cattle and the darkest chapters in human history without a single shrill or self-serving moment:

> The black gate opens on its shuddering hinge.
> Our first contingent is cut out and enters.
> The door swings . . .
> But not before we hear a dull thudding
> As of mauls
> On wood stumps muffled by animal skins . . .
> And we see the flash of axes, rising and falling,
> Like puny lightning in the heavy gloom . . .
> The door swings shut before we might race in and stop it—
> If we could or if we would.
> But we still hear and see—as if in dream.
> And so we begin to sing.

In other poems, McGrath expresses outrage at the grinding banality of American life, but his writing about revolution, as in a little

[1] DEATH SONG, by *Thomas McGrath*. Ed. by *Sam Hamill*. Introduction by *Dale Jacobson*. Copper Canyon Press. $19.00; $10.00.

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poem called "Than Never," can be foolish: "When you wake anywhere to gunfire and revolution / You'll know you're there. / Late! / But not too late." Just what is the poet's attitude here? Are these lines intended to imply that shooting people will solve our many problems? He doesn't say. When he is in full command of his thought, feeling and wit—as in the Audenesque song, "End of a Season," or "The Crippled Artist" or "Legends, Heroes, Myth Figures and Other American Liars"—a fuller humanity emerges. Here are some good lines, expressive of their author's faith, from "Working in Darkness":

> I think of the ones like the poet John Haines,
> During those long years in Alaska,
> Working alone in a cold place,
> Sitting in the darkness outside the pool of light:
> Ice-Fisherman facing the empty hole of the page,
> Patient, the spear poised, waiting for a sign.

The Pakistani writer, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who died in 1984, has also been called a great political poet, usually on the other side of the globe. A Marxist who wrote in Urdu and who won the Lenin Prize, Faiz seems to me, insofar as I can judge from these new translations, a very powerful poet.[2] In 1951, Faiz was arrested by the Pakistani government, accused of plotting a coup and sentenced to death. He spent four years in prison, much of it in solitary confinement, before being released. Anyone who has experienced such deprivations might be excused for polemical weaknesses, but Faiz was a master of lyric irony. "Don't Ask Me For That Love Again" begins as a fairly conventional love poem:

> That which was ours, my love,
> don't ask me for that love again.
> The world then was gold, burnished with light—
> and only because of you. That's what I had believed.
> How could one weep for sorrows other than yours?
> How could one have any sorrow but the one you gave?

History intervenes, of course, proving the futility of the private life, but Faiz brings subtlety as well as outrage to the change:

> All this I'd thought, all this I'd believed.
> But there were other sorrows, comforts other than love.
> The rich had cast their spell on history:
> dark centuries had been embroidered on brocades and silks.

[2] THE REBEL'S SILHOUETTE, by *Faiz Ahmed Faiz*. Trans. by *Agha Shahid Ali*. Peregrine Smith Books. $10.95p.

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Bitter threads began to unravel before me
as I went into alleys and in open markets
saw bodies plastered with ash, bathed in blood.
I saw them sold and bought, again and again.
This too deserves attention.

The poem's negation of personal life is rather frightening, but I admire the ironic understatement of the last quoted line. This sort of touch prevents the poet's nightmarish political visions from becoming melodramatic; a writer as fine as Faiz will not compromise either the truth he has witnessed or the demands of his art.

The history of the Indian subcontinent is such that Faiz must have witnessed bloody clashes, yet many of his poems have a startling composure:

Whenever I went, in whatever direction,
my feet were soaked—
there was so much blood
that bystanders couldn't help asking:
What fashion is this, what new tradition?
For what unknown festival have you dyed your feet?

Agha Shahid Ali, the translator, is himself a poet; he has fashioned an English voice for Faiz that is by turns dry and passionate. But several of the ghazals just don't come across in English, and leave me wishing some approximation of this tantalizing form could have been found. There are a few false notes, apparently from Faiz, like the following moment in a prison poem:

This thought keeps consoling me:
though tyrants may command that lamps be smashed
in rooms where lovers are destined to meet,
they cannot snuff out the moon. . . .

On the other hand, maybe it only seems false because I have seen the recent broadcasts from moonless Kuwait.

There can't be many poetry readers who have not read Seamus Heaney. I wanted to include him in this review because of the kind of poet he is and because he has done an excellent job of editing his *Selected Poems*.[3] Gone are most of the smaller, inconsequential poems from his previous books. From *North* he cut the weaker passages of "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" and "Singing School." From *Field Work* he cut the inflated elegy for Robert Lowell. He has chosen well

[3] SELECTED POEMS 1966–1987, by *Seamus Heaney*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $20.00.

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from *Sweeney Astray*, *Station Island* and *The Haw Lantern*, and added some good prose poems from a 1975 sequence called *Stations*. Now in his early fifties, Heaney (who won the Bennett Award from this magazine) has claimed his best work from the babble of influences and proven that he deserves his popular and critical following.

What first attracted me to his poems was their famous verbal density. Heaney made me feel the weight and significance of words—not great lines, but individual words. Perhaps I betray my small-town origins when I say that Heaney's pastoral images have been important to me, but he also made me acutely aware of Ireland's heartbreaking troubles, and of poetry's ambiguous relationship to politics. So far, these poems have held up well. "Casualty," for example, remains a moving revision of Yeats's "Fisherman" that weighs the cost of sectarian violence. "The Glanmore Sonnets" now seem a bit stiffer than they used to; "Clearances," from *The Haw Lantern*, is a more fluid and moving sequence. Heaney has made too many good poems for me to mention them all, but "Station Island," his series of Dantean encounters and meditations, is among the best of them. Here the poet tries to exorcise the doubts and accusatory voices that challenge his literary life. The dream-ghost of his cousin says that Heaney has "whitewashed ugliness," and before that Heaney pleads with the ghost of another victim of the killings: "Forgive the way I have lived indifferent— / forgive my timid circumspect involvement. . . ." Finally, it is a fellow writer, James Joyce, who provides a gruff absolution:

> 'The English language
> belongs to us. You are raking at dead fires,
>
> rehearsing the old whinges at your age.
> That subject people stuff is a cod's game,
> infantile, like this peasant pilgrimage.'

Heaney's refusal of easy sentiment is, I think, politically responsible. Joyce is the poet's image of a man who knew himself. We're left wondering whether Heaney can or should hold so steady a course, whether or not art is worth a lifetime's devotion.

Derek Walcott's post-colonial epic, *Omeros*, has been widely praised, and it is surely a high point in Walcott's exceedingly productive career.[4] By telling the story of a few St. Lucian islanders—Achille, a fisherman who maintains a steadfast faith in the sea, Hector, who forsakes the sea for a taxi he calls his chariot, the wounded Philoctete and, of course, Helen, the cynosure of men's lives—Walcott can distill

[4] OMEROS, by *Derek Walcott*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $25.00.

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the wealth of mythological and historical phenomena that coexist in those islands. Greek names are no more unnatural in the Caribbean than French or African ones (Achille's ancestor, a slave named Afolabe, is described in one of the remarkable historical sequences, laboring with other slaves to haul one of Admiral Rodney's cannon to a hilly redoubt; because of this, Afolabe is renamed after the Greek hero). In a 1970 essay, "What the Twilight Says," Walcott referred to the Caribbean as a "New Aegean." Fishermen like Achille were "the stoics" who "had grown a fatal adaptability." Like the Old Aegean, the new one has had its slaves and conquerors; it has also had its poets, and Walcott makes his poetic program clear in the essay:

> . . . the forging of a language that went beyond mimicry, a dialect which had the force of revelation as it invented names for things, . . . one which finally settled on its own mode of inflection, and which began to create an oral culture of chants, jokes, folk-songs and fables. . . .

Though the essay refers specifically to Walcott's marvellous plays, *Omeros* emerges from this same ambition. Adapting Dante's *terza rima*, Walcott saturates his images in a vocabulary that is playful (rhyme-rich, punning, both local and classical) and well suited to narrative.

Unfortunately, Walcott has more ambition than his story can bear. With a few exceptions, the lives of his characters interest him less than his large post-colonial vision. He kills off Hector with little concern for the effect it has on his story. His blind poet, Seven Seas, leads us as far afield as Ireland and Wounded Knee. When we revisit the slaving grounds of West Africa with Achille it makes perfect sense, because Achille's vision would certainly take him there. But the equation of Irish troubles and North American genocide with Caribbean life is a a narrative red herring. Walcott leaves his characters for long stretches to pursue an historical vision of his own. When the author encounters the ghost of James Joyce on the Liffey, I feel as though I've boarded a ferry to Heaney's "Station Island."

I think Walcott's post-colonial vision is commendable, but it is also an intellectual's betrayal of the ordinary lives he has taken such pains to evoke. Two of his best characters are the retired Englishman, Major Plunkett, and his Irish wife, Maud, who give the book some of its most moving scenes. Like Achille, Plunkett had an ancestor with Admiral Rodney; history binds the descendants of masters and slaves in more ways than they know. But love and fantasy have also bound them. In the following passage Plunkett watches the beautiful Helen working in his house:

> He murmured to the mirror: No. My thoughts are pure.
> They're meant to help her people, ignorant and poor.

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But these, smiled the bracelet, are the vows of empire.

Black maid or blackmail, her presence in the stone house
was oblique but magnetic. Every hour of the day
even poking around the pigs, he knew where she was;

he could see her shadow through the sheets of laundry,
and since she and her shadow were the same, the sun
behind her often made their blunt silhouette seem

naked, or sometimes, carrying a clean basin
of water to the bleaching stones, she wore the same
smile that made a drama out of every passing.

Rhymes like "basin" and "passing" are among the book's frequent charms, and this scene (as well as others) makes me grateful that Walcott can still descend to the simple power of empathy.

I wish I could read Yehuda Amichai in the original Hebrew.[5] What comes across in these new translations is a spirit of inclusiveness and love that is informed by the painful shocks of modern history, particularly Israeli history. Even visiting his mother's grave, he remembers, "Twenty years ago this graveyard was / on the border, facing the enemy's positions. / The tombstones were a good defense against tanks." Amichai can't afford the luxury of uncomplicated feelings. His humorous presence—he is himself the best character in these poems—seems a sane man's response to the insane legacy of human suffering. There is no self-importance in his poetry, though there is plenty of self. "I am a poor prophet," he declares in one poem, and here is an antiheroic passage from another, "Anniversaries of War":

What else did I learn? I learned to reserve a path for retreat.
In foreign lands I rent a room in a hotel
near the airport or railroad station.
And even in wedding halls
always to watch the little door
with the "Exit" sign in red letters.

Along with the poems about war, there are some fine love poems, several of them written with philosophical bemusement:

In the sand I saw a girl learning to dress
or undress in public under a huge towel:

[5] EVEN A FIST WAS ONCE AN OPEN PALM WITH FINGERS, by *Yehuda Amichai*. Trans. by *Barbara and Benjamin Harshav*. Harper Perennial. $10.95p.

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what a wonderful dance of her body. What a hidden serpent
movement,
what a struggle between dressing and undressing,
between Jacob and his angel, between lover and beloved.

As is often the case with translations, the verbal flavor of these poems sometimes seems watered down, but Amichai and water is better than no Amichai at all.

I find most of Peter Makuck's new poems too oblique or imprecise, especially when I am looking for real conviction and feeling.[6] I will admit that the subjects of some of these poems seem relatively unimportant, but that is not enough to turn me away from a book. Rather, a faulty sense of closure is at work here; when I set the book aside, no line or image remains, no powerful feeling survives. The trouble began with A.R. Ammons' clumsy blurb on the cover: "Particular grist informs Makuck's vision and confirms his imagination's grasp." Sentences like that make me feel I am losing my mind, though this book is better than its blurb. When I reread the poems, I find in the clearest of them a humane intelligence searching for direction (navigational metaphors abound). My criticism is that their expression often isn't moving or precise enough to invite me into the poems and make me want to linger there.

The book's second section is composed of travelogues, and when the scenery changes I become more attentive. "Leavings," the longest poem in this section, is an elegy for Jean-Claude Rouiller composed of fragments that work partly by withholding important information. In the third section, "Hole in the Wall" is an accurate poem about childhood and the passage of time, and "Sound Buoy," too, is well-written:

In soft seas
Its moans
Are more our own.
If I name it
Red Nun of the Narrows,
The pleasure won't last,
For it turns unruly at a whim
And will outlast our coming
And going.

Several small moments come invitingly clear in these poems, but I wish they had intimated more of what lies beneath their surfaces.

[6] THE SUNKEN LIGHTSHIP, by *Peter Makuck*. BOA Editions. $18.00; $9.00.

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I began this review with generalizations about political poetry, and I've shifted to poems in which engagement with the world is more subtle. It would be difficult to imagine a subtler engagement than that of Yves Bonnefoy (another winner of the Bennett Award).[7] These poems, which trace and retrace the same paths in the French countryside (particularly Valsaintes, where Bonnefoy had a favorite house), find in their isolation a rare, meditative intimacy. They seem to luxuriate in silences, whispering of "Time so full it ceases to be." It has been quite a while since I read poetry that could speak of the eternal, and do so with such beauty. Bonnefoy's profound engagement with the world comes, paradoxically, from his belief in our estrangement:

> Earth, what we call poetry
> Will have felt, in this century, such desire for you,
> Without ever taking upon you the blessings
> Of the act of love!

Clearly Bonnefoy is steeped in theories about language as signification, the prelinguistic I-Thou bond that has been broken, so that "Language," as he says in an excellent interview at the back of this book, "deprives us of that closeness to the world we need. . . ." Writing becomes an effort "To open the kernel of absence in words." The same is true of human relations: "Man and woman, / When do they ever know / That their passion is binding or coming apart?"

But theories of estrangement do little to explain the luminosity of these poems (well translated by John Naughton). Notice the metaphysical precision of this stanza from "The Well":

> Man's voyage, and woman's, is long, longer than life,
> It is a star at the end of the road, a sky
> That was shining, we thought, between two trees.
> When the bucket touches the water that lifts it up,
> There is joy, then the chain overwhelms it.

That touch of bucket and water is a moment between moments, between ideal yearning and the chain of functional language. A poet who can probe consciousness with such quietude seems in many ways a far cry from anyone else under discussion here. I almost titled this review "The Real Thing," but Bonnefoy reminds us that "among the wild flowers, the wax ones / Are not the least touching. . . ." The honesty of good poets derives partly from their acknowledgment of poetry's limitations, their commitment, under diverse circumstances, to the beautiful, and their awareness of how seldom it is achieved. In

[7] IN THE SHADOW'S LIGHT, by *Yves Bonnefoy*. Trans. by *John Naughton*. University of Chicago Press. $24.95; $12.95.

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the interview, Bonnefoy observes, "Poetry is what tries to make music of what occurs in life." Because of that attempt, the losses in these poems are also affirmations:

> For every earthly moment is a crossroads
> Where, when summer ends, our shadow goes
> Toward its other land in the same trees,
> And rarely does one take up a second time
> The branch with which all summer long
> One bent the grasses absentmindedly. . . .

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DAVID DOOLEY

Two Anthologies

POETRY ANTHOLOGIES, LIKE TEXTBOOKS, literary histories, and course syllabi, inevitably suggest canonical authors and works. The anthologist of Victorian poetry has a much easier task than the anthologist of contemporary American poetry, regardless of whether the editor chooses to rely on, revise, or reject the current critical consensus. Thus Christopher Ricks, in compiling *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*,[1] knows he follows generations of readers who have applauded, damned, discussed, argued about, analyzed, measured, and lived with nineteenth-century poems.

Ricks offers no radically new view of Victorian poetry; like most readers today, he evidently finds Browning, Tennyson, and Hopkins the most important figures, and features their work accordingly. Arnold, Meredith, FitzGerald, Swinburne, and Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti are also well represented.

Since Ricks reasonably interprets "Victorian" to mean not a particular kind of poetry, but poetry written during the reign of Victoria (1837–1901), he also includes early work of Hardy, Housman, and Yeats, as well as two late poems by Wordsworth. Nonetheless, Ricks revises and refines traditional notions of Victorian poetry. Banished are such once-popular exemplars of Victorian taste as Henley's "Invictus," Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven," O'Shaughnessy's "We are the music-makers," and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "How do I love thee?" Absent, too, is that quintessential poem of the 1890s, Dowson's protest that he has been faithful to Cynara in his fashion. All were present in an anthology as recent as the 1965 edition of Jerome Buckley's *Poetry of the Victorian Period*. Since Ricks decided to include sections of sequences but not sections of long poems except for Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, authors of long narrative poems like Patmore and Hawker appear less favorably than they might. Curiously, William Morris is reduced to five short faceless lyrics; a reader unfamiliar with his work would never imagine that Morris primarily wrote narratives. Morris' "The Haystack in the Floods," for instance, is more memorable than scores of poems in the anthology.

What does Ricks include that we might not have expected? Much

[1] THE NEW OXFORD BOOK OF VICTORIAN VERSE, ed. by *Christopher Ricks*. Oxford University Press. $30.00; $12.95.

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comic poetry, from the nonsense verse of Carroll and Lear to portions of Hood's tale of Miss Kilmansegg and her precious leg; numerous poems about the "two nations" of rich and poor (Clough's "The Latest Decalogue" and Davidson's "Thirty Bob a Week" are particularly noteworthy); poems about the position of women in Victorian society (the excerpts from *Aurora Leigh*; Gerald Massey's epigram "Womankind"; Dollie Radford's "Soliloquy of a Maiden Aunt"). He selects work by Arthur Symons and Michael Field which offers pre-echoes of imagism. Most significantly, Ricks devotes considerable space to five poets whom he evidently finds undervalued: Arthur Hugh Clough, John Clare, William Barnes, Emily Brontë, and John Gray. Ricks includes all of Clough's epistolary novel in unrhymed hexameters *Amours de Voyage*, and that is cause for rejoicing. Clough's wishy-washy but sympathetic hero, Claude, is an ancestor, direct or collateral, of J. Alfred Prufrock, numerous Henry James heroes, and, in the scene where he witnesses a man's death in Rome, Forster's *A Room with a View*. Clare, Brontë, and Barnes are interesting minor figures, though the expanded treatment Ricks gives them convinces me even more of their relative slightness. Clare rarely rises to the level of his " 'I am' " and "Sonnet: 'I am,' " nor does Brontë equal her poem "Remembrance." Barnes is a useful link to Hardy, but few other editors would want to include 23 of his dialect poems. Both Barnes and Clare write pastoral poetry which does not forget that farming is hard labor. John Gray is a curious poet, perhaps given more space because he wrote more openly, if by our standards still euphemistically, about sex than his contemporaries did, yet his most appealing poem is about nuns playing badminton!

Ricks also expands our view of Victorian poetry by including work by many obscure poets. Lord de Tabley, for instance, wrote passable imitations of Tennyson's "Tithonus" ("Philoctetes") and Browning's "Childe Roland" ("The Knight in the Wood"). T. E. Brown's "Dartmoor: Sunset at Chagford" reveals another Victorian poet grappling with questions of religious faith. Some of Ricks's choices are questionable, not least the effusion by E. Nesbit which begins

> Oh, baby, baby, baby dear,
> We lie alone together here

or the poem by George R. Sims which begins

> I scorn the doubts and cares that hurt
> The world and all its mockeries,
> My only care is now to squirt
> The ferns among my rockeries.

This does sound rather like Betjeman, but that's scarcely a point in its favor.

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Ricks's collection forcefully suggests how much of the best Victorian poetry is due to the influence of the novel and its greater psychological penetration (Browning, Clough, Meredith, and to some extent Tennyson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning) and to formal and metrical innovation (Tennyson, Browning, Hopkins, Arnold, Clough, FitzGerald). The Victorian lyric has its triumphs—Tennyson's "Now sleeps the crimson petal" and Swinburne's "A Leave-Taking," for instance—yet the inclusiveness of Ricks's anthology points up the weakness of the Victorian lyric tradition. The refinement of diction and rhythm in Christina Rossetti is a considerable accomplishment, yet the price of this refinement is the exclusion of large areas of human experience. Poets less skillful than Rossetti often sound inconsequential. Readers apt to think of Victorian poetry as having jingly meter and stilted diction will find specimens of those among the lesser writers here. Among the best poems by lesser writers in the Victorian lyric tradition are Macaulay's "Epitaph on a Jacobite" and Ruskin's "La Madonna dell' Acqua." Lionel Johnson also seems a stronger writer than I remembered, especially in "The Dark Angel." Most readers will be impressed by the breadth and variety of poetry in this anthology, yet one is also struck forcefully by the gap between the best writers and the others. If, as Eliot argued, a poetic tradition can sometimes be strong enough to supply deficiencies in individual poets, in nineteenth-century England only a touch of genius would suffice.

As we draw nearer the present, uncertainty grows about which poets to include. Even commercial considerations may play some part. Will we sell more copies of our anthology in Iowa City if we include Marvin Bell, and more in Missoula if we include Richard Hugo? Whereas Ricks thinks nothing of devoting 45 pages to Browning and eight lines to Frederick Locker-Lampson, J. D. McClatchy finds it necessary in his introduction to *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*[2] to justify granting more pages to Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop than to any other poets. All 65 poets in the anthology receive at least three poems except Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Richard Howard, who are each allotted at least seven pages for more extended work. McClatchy suggests that "any anthology is finally a gathering of poems rather than poets." True enough, in one sense, yet when McClatchy includes seven poems by Randall Jarrell and none by Weldon Kees, six poems by David Wagoner and none by William Stafford, six by Howard Moss and none by Louis Simpson, one can only conclude that this is very much an anthology of poets rather than poems. Many poets have written individual pieces—Philip Booth's "Stove," George Drew's "The Drowning of Christopher French," Carolyn Forché's "The Colonel," Charles Mar-

[2] THE VINTAGE BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY, ed. by *J. D. McClatchy*. Vintage. $14.95p.

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tin's "Passages from Friday," to name four widely varying examples—superior to dozens of poems included here.

Unlike most editors who write poetry, McClatchy has foregone the opportunity to include his own work. One assumes he does not care much for narrative poetry, dramatic monologues, or prose poems, since he includes so few. The decision not to include long poems makes Frank Bidart seem less impressive than he might. If McClatchy has sometimes chosen inferior poems which turn up regularly in anthologies—Jarrell's "Next Day," Snodgrass' "April Inventory," Plath's "Lady Lazarus," none among its author's best work—he has also made surprising but worthy choices, such as Kinnell's "The Man Splitting Wood in the Daybreak," Bishop's "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto," and John Ashbery's "Pyrography." The selections from Bishop are excellent, and those from authors like John Berryman, A. R. Ammons and Ashbery are generally both representative and good. On the other hand, one can only wish McClatchy had represented Edgar Bowers by "The Stoic" and "The Astronomers of Mont Blanc," and had selected Robert Hass's "A Story About the Body," "Paschal Lamb," and "Against Botticelli" to go along with "Meditation at Lagunitas." Why omit W. S. Merwin's "The Drunk in the Furnace" but include his "St. Vincent's," which could pass for student work, especially the ending?

In his introduction McClatchy refers to limitations of budget. One wonders which poems—early Lowell, perhaps?—were excluded because of expensive permissions. McClatchy, like at least another recent anthologist, Helen Vendler, includes only one Lowell poem prior to *Life Studies* (A. Poulin includes only two). Should we quarrel with the anthologists for preferring the dreary work from Lowell's last phase (*History* and after) or with Lowell's publishers for asking too much money to reprint Lowell's superior early poems? McClatchy does Lowell no favors by choosing several late poems in which the author worries about his future reputation. Unlike many readers of McClatchy's generation, some of whom knew Lowell personally, I consider Lowell a Charles Lebrun rather than a Poussin. The scale and range are genuinely impressive, but a closer look reveals weaknesses of diction, structure, tonal consonance, and, especially in the later years, rhythm. To give only one example, think of the paired, incongruous adjectives which clot so many of his lines.

Unlike Vendler, who omits poets who descend directly from the Pound-Williams line except for Gary Snyder and Frank Bidart, McClatchy makes his volume more comprehensive by including such representative figures as Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, and Denise Levertov. In addition, McClatchy's choice of poets from the older generations (born prior to 1920) seems generally reasonable. Weldon Kees is the major omission; I would also argue for some of the "Gardens of the World" poems of Radcliffe Squires, which compare favorably with Merwin.

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Calendar of Readings 1991-92 Readings take place on Mondays, except as noted.

October	7	**Writers-at-Work Live Interview:** **Alice Walker** is interviewed by **Barbara Christian**
	7	**Alice Walker** reads from her work
	14	**Adrienne Rich**
	21	**Mordecai Richler**
	28	**A.S. Byatt** and **Diane Johnson**
November	4	**Eudora Welty**
	11	**Charles Johnson** and **Paule Marshall**
	18	**Les Murray** and **Christopher Logue**
	21	**Ved Mehta** (Thurs.)
	25	**Andrei Voznesensky**
December	2	**Ellen Bryant Voigt** and **Jane Flanders**
	7	**WORLD WAR II: LITERATURE AND EXPERIENCE** with **Joseph Heller, Samuel Hynes, Mary Lee Settle, Louis Simpson, William Styron** (Sat.)
	9	**Writers-at-Work Live Interview:** **Ryszard Kapuscinski** is interviewed by **Scott Malcomson**
	9	**Ryszard Kapuscinski** and **Peter Schneider** read from their work
	16	**Lars Gustafsson** and **Michael Ondaatje**
	22	**Joseph Brodsky, Anthony Hecht** and **Mona Van Duyn** (Sun.)
January	6	**STATE OF THE ARTS I: AMERICAN FICTION** with **Toni Cade Bambara, Stanley Elkin, Mary Gordon, Allan Gurganus, Maxine Hong Kingston, Robert Stone** and moderator **Paul Auster**
	9	**J.G. Ballard** and **Tobias Wolff** (Thurs.)
	12	**Robertson Davies** (Sun.)
	13	**Fay Weldon** and **A.N. Wilson**
	27	**STATE OF THE ARTS II: AMERICAN DRAMA** with **Robert Brustein, John Guare, Arthur Kopit, Wendy Wasserstein, George C. Wolfe** and moderator **Rocco Landesman**
February	3	**David Grossman**
	10	**Michael Frayn** in a reading and in conversation with **Calvin Trillin**
	16	**Spalding Gray** reads from his forthcoming novel (Sun.)
	24	**THE TENTH MUSE I: Robert Pinsky** introduces **Mark Halliday, Marie Howe** and **Tom Sleigh**
March	2	**STATE OF THE ARTS III: AMERICAN POETRY** with **Marilyn Hacker, Michael Harper, Garrett Kaoru Hongo, Brad Leithauser, Katha Pollitt** and moderator **Sven Birkerts**
	9	**Doris Grumbach** and **Joseph Caldwell**
	16	**Ian Frazier** and **Jamaica Kincaid**
	23	**THE TENTH MUSE II: Grace Schulman** introduces **Marianne Boruch, Nancy Esposito** and **Eamon Grennan**
	24	**NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE FESTIVAL I** with **N. Scott Momaday, Linda Hogan** and **Thomas King** (Tues.)
	30	**Lucille Clifton** and **Thylias Moss**
April	6	**Alice Adams** and **Harriet Doerr**
	13	**Charles Simic** and **Tomaz Salamun**
	20	**Jayne Anne Phillips** and **Gish Jen**
	27	**John Irving**
May	4	**"Discovery"/*The Nation* 1992 Poetry Contest Winners**
	11	**NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE FESTIVAL II** with **Simon Ortiz, Leslie Marmon Silko** and **Luci Tapahonso**
	19	**Toni Morrison** (Tues.)

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Almost half the poets in this anthology, 31 of 65, were born between 1920 and 1930. 1926 and 1927 were especially good years for American poetry, with A. R. Ammons, Allen Ginsberg, James Merrill, and Frank O'Hara born in 1926, and Ashbery, Kinnell, and James Wright born in 1927. Considered as a group, this is the finest generation of American poets since the modernists. These poets are remarkable not only for the quality of their work, but for the divergence of styles among them (consider merely the seven named above). McClatchy is surely right to devote so much space to their work.

Nonetheless, certain omissions do raise an eyebrow. Apparently the American academy has not caught up with three poets of this generation who have published their best work in the late seventies and eighties: Donald Hall, Jack Gilbert, and Hayden Carruth. The excellence of Hall's late work has been apparent to many readers. Gilbert's *Monolithos*, a book which grows with every rereading, is as fine as any volume of poetry published by an American in the 1980s. Many poets have imitated the surface effects of Donne and Marvell; Gilbert, who does not, is the one American poet who combines disparate perspectives on experience out of metaphysical necessity, as they did. Hayden Carruth is as uneven as any poet in English, yet that does not affect the quality of his best work. In the future it may be a critical commonplace that Carruth's *The Sleeping Beauty* surpasses two of its models, Lowell's *History* and Berryman's *Dream Songs*. Readers are invited to compare, say, Hall's "Naming of Horses," "Twelve Seasons," "Merle Bascom's .22," and "Wolf Knife," all in Hall's *Old and New Poems*; Gilbert's "Love Poem," "A Description of Happiness in København," "Translation into the Original," and "Threshing the Fire," all in *Monolithos*; and Carruth's "The Cows at Night," "Abandoned Ranch, Big Bend," "John Dryden," and "Marvin McCabe," all in his *Selected Poems*, with the work of their contemporaries McClatchy does include.

Absent, too, from this anthology is Robert Bly. McClatchy might argue that Bly is more interesting as polemicist and as character than as poet; if so, I'd be inclined to agree. Nonetheless, Bly has been the single most influential poet on the next generation of poets. Consider the popularity of such Bly trademarks as the emphasis on image, the mystical overtones, the devaluation of the aural, the restricted vocabulary, the thin textures, and the self-consciously simple syntax. Why include marginal figures like William Meredith and Jean Garrigue and omit a poet of genuine historical significance? Why include a Bly epigone like Mark Strand and leave out Bly himself? McClatchy selects poems by Strand, Charles Simic, Charles Wright, Marvin Bell, and Louise Glück which are unthinkable without Bly. The last section of Glück's "The Garden," for instance, could easily pass for Bly.

McClatchy's bias is toward the urban—some of the more questionable choices live or have lived in New York—and urbane. One significant strain of contemporary American poetry might be de-

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scribed as the line of wit, a poetry, often in rhyme, meter, or syllabics, which particularly values craft, wordplay, references to works of art, and a defensive irony used to ward off emotion. Auden is often the most important ancestor. Almost any anthologist of the period would include some work along these lines. Vendler, for example, chooses poems by James Merrill, Richard Wilbur, Amy Clampitt, and Howard Nemerov. McClatchy also includes these authors, as well as Howard Moss, Mona Van Duyn, Anthony Hecht, John Hollander, Richard Howard, William Meredith, and two other poets, Donald Justice and W. D. Snodgrass, whose work sometimes exhibits this style. Two earlier poets, Jarrell and Berryman, have obvious affinities with this group. At their weakest, some of these writers fall into the Academic Cute or University Half-Wit manner, believing that puns automatically mean wit, e.g., Jarrell's litany of detergents, "Moving from Cheer to Joy, from Joy to All" or Hecht's "*Mens sana* in men's sauna." Who would suppose that Hecht's foolish pun comes from a sometimes impressive poem about the nature of evil? If some of these poets are too fond of "mordancies of the armchair," to use a fine Donald Justice phrase, to accomplish first-rate work, the best of them have mastered craft at a level that goes some distance toward vindicating McClatchy's emphasis on their work.

A commonly held, if not always directly expressed, view of those poets now in their late forties to late fifties is that this generation is decidedly inferior to the 1926–27 generation, a kind of poetic interregnum. Certainly the younger poets are as a group less ambitious and less innovative, possessing fewer technical and expressive resources than did their predecessors. For instance, I am aware of only one essay (by Robert Miklitsch on Hass) which argues that any of these writers is a major poet, although I would be interested to see what arguments could be made on their behalf. One need not agree with every high assessment of Ammons, Ashbery, or Merrill to understand why such claims have been made. McClatchy includes 16 poets (Strand, Charles Wright, Audre Lorde, Jay Wright, C. K. Williams, Marvin Bell, Simic, Michael S. Harper, Bidart, Robert Pinsky, Hass, Dave Smith, Hacker, Glück, Sandra McPherson, and Alfred Corn) from this interregnum generation (b. 1934–43). None of these lacks talent, nor do two or three dozen others who might equally well have been chosen (Hass and Bidart seem to me the only two who must be chosen). All these writers are young enough to surpass their earlier efforts completely. McClatchy rightly rejects several prominent but ungifted figures; he does not, like one anthologist of interregnum verse, offer Raymond Carver's "Your Dog Dies" for our admiration.

Noteworthy, too, is McClatchy's omission (correct, in my opinion) of second- or third-generation confessional poets except for Frank Bidart and Marilyn Hacker. Bidart revitalized confessional poetry with his use of Poundian typography; Hacker, following aspects of

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Merrill's late work, freshened the confessional manner with her use of formal structures like the sonnet. Confessional poetry in free verse now tends to be not only literary and conventional, in the pejorative sense, but often self-congratulatory as well. Compare the revolting smugness of C. K. Williams' "The Gas Station," which McClatchy does select, with the pain of Anne Sexton's "Wanting To Die" or "With Mercy for the Greedy."

Only four poets born as late as the 1950s are included: Edward Hirsch, Rita Dove, Jorie Graham, and Gjertrud Schnackenberg. Hirsch seems a better than average workshop poet; the three women offer more interesting possibilities. None of Dove's best work, which is in the book-length sequence *Thomas and Beulah*, is included. Dove's difficulty is that her rich subject matter seems to require narrative development, but she has been trained primarily in lyrical techniques. Graham, on the other hand, wants to write in as elevated a lyric mode as possible; preciosity is the most obvious danger. Her "Orpheus and Eurydice" reveals an excellent ear, an interesting sense of shape, and shrewd analogues to slow-motion and stop-action photography. Schnackenberg's "Supernatural Love" shows an adequate control of rhymed iambic pentameter triplets, a difficult form, and an impressive integration of image, theme, verbal texture, and meditative progression. Useful points of comparison are the overblown rhetoric of Dave Smith's "The Roundhouse Voices" and the shapeless ramble of Robert Pinsky's "The Hearts," both representative of their generation (Pinsky is a much abler critic than poet). McClatchy leaves out several other accomplished poets born in the 1950s: Dana Gioia, Allen Hoey, Andrew Hudgins, Elizabeth Spires, and the Vikram Seth of *The Golden Gate*, for instance. Perhaps this will not prove to be a second interregnum generation.

Despite my reservations about particular editorial choices, the reader unfamiliar with contemporary poetry will discover, with a little digging, many outstanding works in a variety of styles. What could be more diverse than Ginsberg's "Howl" and Wilbur's "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World," Kinnell's "The Bear" and Merrill's "Lost in Translation," Ammons' "Gravelly Run" and O'Hara's "Why I Am Not a Painter"?

Canon formation proceeds by a multiplicity of acts of judgment, as one compares poems by an individual author, poems by different authors who are contemporaries, and poems by writers of different eras. A writer like Elizabeth Bishop so outshines her contemporaries that to gauge her achievement one can only turn to poets of the past like Tennyson and Hopkins. Throughout the process one compares one's own judgments with those of others. By now Ricks and McClatchy may be more familiar with the process than they ever wanted to be. As readers, whenever we register our likes and dislikes we continue the process of comparison and contrast, rejection and acceptance, affirmation and challenge.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

W. S. DI PIERO's latest book is *Out of Eden: Essays on Modern Art* (University of California Press). His new book of poems will appear this spring from the University of Chicago Press. . . . WILLIAM TREVOR* is the author most recently of *Family Sins* (Viking). In 1990 he was awarded The Hudson Review's Bennett Award for distinguished achievement in the short story and novel. . . . Born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1924, HOLLY STEVENS* edited *Letters of Wallace Stevens* (1966) and *The Palm at the End of the Mind* (1971); *Souvenirs and Prophecies: The Young Wallace Stevens* (1977) grew from research done as a Senior Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities. All three books were published by Alfred A. Knopf. She has lectured at many universities and institutions across the country, from the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., to the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, where her father's archives are located. Formerly business manager of *The Yale Review*, she has been enjoying retirement. She wishes to thank Ruth Hein for her invaluable assistance in the preparation of this material. . . . ROBERT MEZEY* has been since 1976 professor and poet-in-residence at Pomona College. His new collection, *Evening Wind*, was recently published by Wesleyan University Press.

SARAH PRIESTMAN* recently completed her M.F.A. in creative writing at The American University in Washington, D.C., and is settling in Burlington, Vermont. . . . SARA LONDON* lives in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where she works as a free-lance journalist. . . . NEAL BOWERS' new collection of poems, *Night Vision*, is due this fall from Bookmark Press. . . . Henry Taylor selected WILL WELLS's* first book for the 1987 Anhinga Award, and the book was published in the fall of 1988 by Anhinga Press. . . . JOHN DREXEL* is currently editing *The Encyclopedia of the Twentieth Century* (Facts on File). . . . PETER MAKUCK was Visiting Writer at Brigham Young University during the last academic year. Editor of *Tar River Poetry*, he teaches at East Carolina University. His most recent volume of poetry, *The Sunken Lightship* (BOA Editions, Ltd.), appeared in 1990.

MARCIA B. SIEGEL's new collection of dance reviews and articles, *The Tail of the Dragon—New Dance 1976–1982*, is being published this fall by Duke University Press. . . . GEORGE KEARNS teaches literature and critical theory at Rutgers. . . . DAVID MASON's book, *The Buried Houses*, is co-winner of this year's Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize, and will be published in December by Story Line Press. . . . The same press is also the publisher of DAVID DOOLEY's collection of poems, *The Volcano Inside*.

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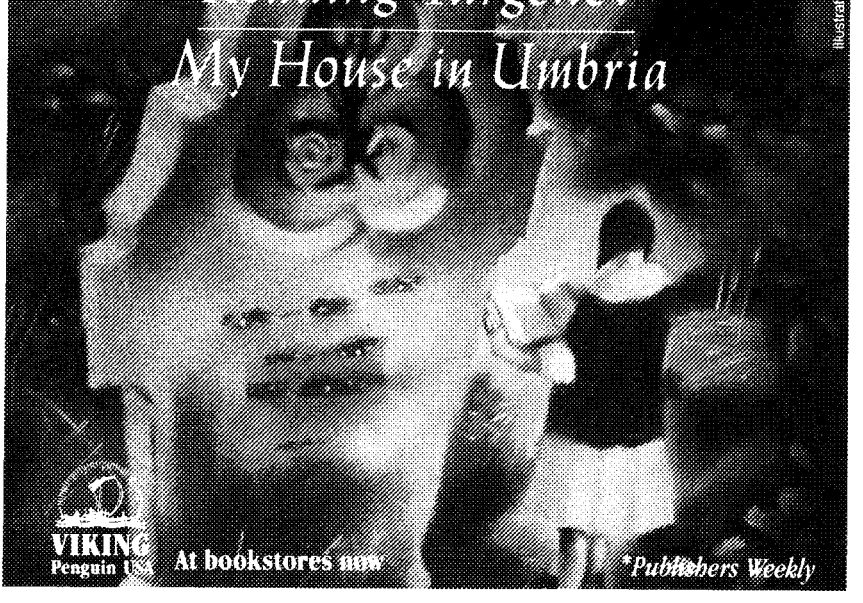

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IN THIS ISSUE:

On the gravel in front of the red-brick church I vividly recall Miss Willoughby. Terribly, she appears. Severe and beautiful, she pedals against the wind on her huge black bicycle. "Someone laughed during prayers," she accuses, and you feel at once that it was you, although you know it wasn't. *V.poor* she writes in your headline book when you've done your best to reproduce, four times, perfectly, *Pride goeth before destruction.*

—William Trevor, "In Co. Cork," p. 377.

It seems to be that Cabell's Jurgen is obtainable, but expensive. Pitts Sanborn got a copy somewhere some time ago. I have never read it. Cabell used to write for Harper's years ago, and of all the loathsome, sentimental piffle that Harper's has contained his was the worst. I don't believe that because he happened to write something about sex there will be anything more to it than usual. You know, we have reached a point about sex where we can put it in our pipes and smoke it.

—Wallace Stevens, "Letters to Ferdinand Reyher," p. 381.

Inside the truckstops I strolled from booth to booth, the Miss Manners of Mileage, inquiring politely about a lift. I intentionally appeared boyish: cropped hair, big jackets, worn Levis, boots. Unlike the "pavement princesses"—hookers whose red-light district was the truckstop's back lot—I was respectful, articulate, straightforward. I once left a woman companion to her own devices when her saucy strategies violated my own hitchhiking ethic: No fooling around. Just looking for a little dialogue and a long ride. And more was never demanded of me.

—Sarah Priestman, "Starlight," p. 419.

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